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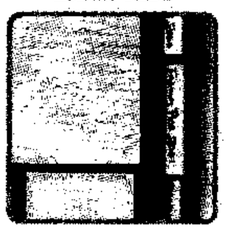

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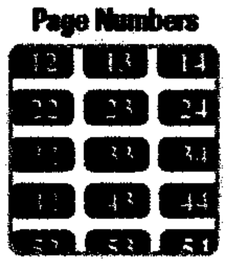

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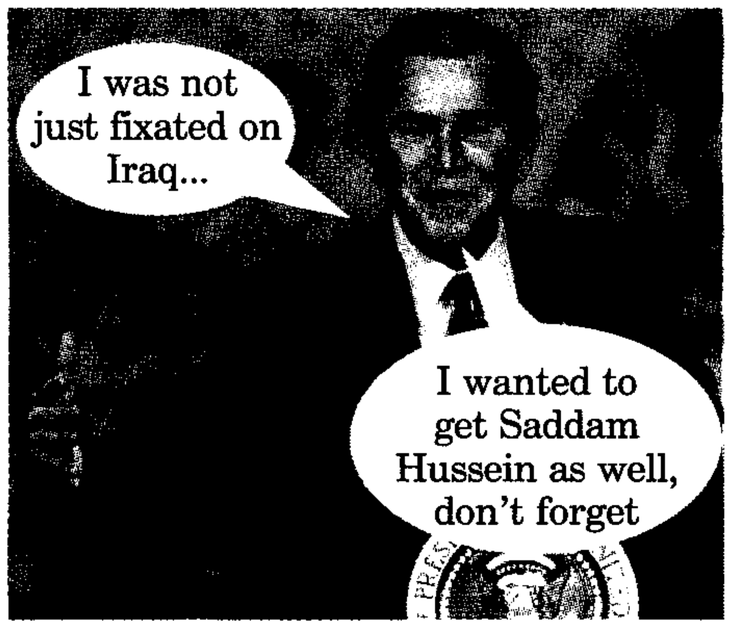
THE DECISION by Her Majesty's Government not to deprive Lord Archole of his title is to be applauded. Whilst holding no brief for my fellow peer, it would be a black day for this country if every peer who had committed some minor misdemeanour such as perjury were to be robbed of his rightful inheritance.

Which of us in the House of Lords can say with his hand on his heart that he has never lied in a court of law in an attempt to pervert the course of justice and gain a huge amount of money?

No, this sort of retrospective legislation is petty, vindictive and would deprive the second chamber of some of its most colourful characters.

Lord Gnome of Crossharbour,
Brockett House,
Lucan Lane,
Archer St Jeffrey,
The Grand Kaygan Islands.

BUSH HITS BACK



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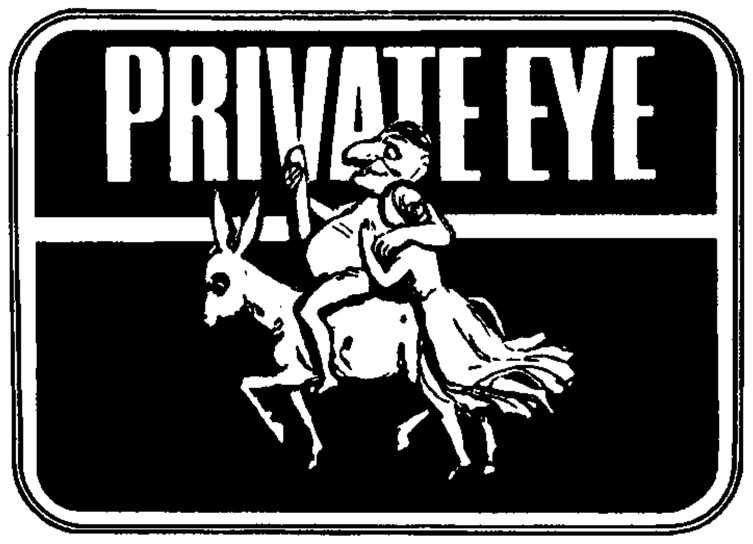

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MUCH speculation in 10 Downing Street over what is already being dubbed "Tony's lavender list" and who will be up for a gong in the next honours.

Step forward the "three Margarets". Though largely unknown outside the narrow world of "new" Labour politics, they have been essential to maintaining the Dear Leader's grip on the party machine.

Margaret McDonagh was a general-secretary of the Labour party and is the only former party head to hold office under Blair who has not been rewarded with a seat in the House of Lords. Margaret Prosser is a former senior official with the left-wing Transport & General Workers' Union, who along with her trade union colleague Margaret Wall has helped ensure that Labour's national executive committee could always be relied upon to vote the "right way".

Then there is Tony Blair's veteran pollster and sometime soothsayer, Philip Gould, who seems to have had to wait a good deal longer than most to receive his just reward.

HARDLINE home secretary David Blunkett has recently been musing to selected hacks that he wouldn't be averse to "one day becoming foreign secretary – if asked". But those who know Blunkett can spot a feint at a hundred paces.

In fact Blunkett covets chancellor Gordon Brown's job – and has done for almost as long as anyone can remember. The problem is that the ambitious Blunkett has approximately no heavyweight friends in cabinet to bolster his case. And should the brooding Brown one day take the reins of power, Blunkett can look forward to a shortish stint as secretary of state for agriculture.

GORDON BROWN's housing review, written by former CBI economist Kate Barker, savaged the housebuilding industry, accusing it of being unresponsive and failing to build enough houses. But the report was still welcomed by the House Builders Federation. Why?

On Barker's recommendation the chancellor is set to reward the very firms whose failure to build houses has left first-time buyers stranded. He intends to tear up planning regulations to tempt developers to build more properties.

Some developers will be stung for a windfall tax on land that goes up in value when it gets planning permission, but the industry can live with this given the massive planning prize on offer elsewhere. Indeed, it marks a spectacularly good return on the £10,896 the House Builders Federation donated to the Labour party to pay for a reception for labour councillors. Though as a federation spokesman said, this "was not related to the Barker review… this is just a regular event to keep housing at the top of the agenda".

JOINED-UP GOVERNMENT

WHILE the government frets about the effects of obesity and poor nutrition in Britain, Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust has stuck a full-page glossy ad from McDonald's on the back of its staff handbook.

Health-conscious staff are promised a free burger or McMuffin when they buy a Value Meal on production of their NHS ID badge.

"I can't find any crops to circle"

US PRESIDENT George Bush is attracting support from unusual quarters in his bid to beat John Kerry to the White House this autumn.

Joining the neo-con chorus rooting for Dubya is none other than the Abu Hafs al Masri Brigade, one of the shadowy groups that claims responsibility for the Madrid bombings.

"It is not possible to find a leader more foolish than you [Bush], who deals with matters by force rather than with wisdom," said a statement sent by the group to a London-based Arabic newspaper. "Kerry will kill our nation while it sleeps because he and the Democrats have the cunning to embellish blasphemy and present it to the Arab and Muslim nation as civilization… Because of this we desire you [Bush] to be elected."

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"Europe has only made progress in the past following dramatic events. If the victims of the dramatic events in Madrid last week help to further European integration, they will not have died in vain."

— Dutch MP Rennee van der Linden addressing the European parliament's constitutional affairs committee.

BEVERLEY HUGHES — IMMIGRATION SHOCK

Street Of Shame

THE bank holiday weekend sees the next stage in Jeffrey Archer's reinvention of himself as the valiantly recovering victim of a terrible miscarriage of justice. Ahead of another attempt to overturn his perjury conviction, Archer will run in the Flora London marathon and seek to break the world record for sponsorship raised by a single athlete.

First up to promote this heroic deed was *Daily Mail* sports columnist Ian Wooldridge, who wrote an arslikhan piece last weekend about the boundless charitable impulses of "my old friend" Lord Archer. By unfortunate coincidence, however, the same day's *Mail* carried an interview by Angela Levin with Mary Archer's former secretary Jane Williams, who has already lost her home and now faces bankruptcy for breach of confidence after revealing that the fragrant Mary had had an Anne Robinson.

As the *Mail* pointed out, Archer's prison diary included a conversation with a fellow-convict who said: "By the way, if you want that bitch of a secretary bumped off, I'll be happy to arrange it for you." Though this was thought to refer to Angie Peppiatt, who testified against Archer at his trial, Williams thinks it might have been a threat to her. "I've lived in fear ever since," she told Levin. "I believe Jeffrey deliberately included the convict's offer in his book as a warning to me. I feel that my life is in permanent danger."

Levin also noted that "only Jane knows the full details of what she told the police about the goings on in the Archer household in the run up to the perjury trial – information that could perhaps destroy Mary's determined attempts to help her husband win the right to a second appeal… while only Mary, who has the power to let Jane off paying the costs [of the breach of confidence case] can relieve Jane of her financial burden."

Uninformed *Mail* readers might foolishly detect a possible *quid pro quo* here. How lucky, then, that Ian Wooldridge is on hand only a few pages later to reassure them that Jeffrey is the most charitable man on the planet.

THE *SPECTATOR*'s Wallace Arnold-alike sports columnist, Michael Henderson, sacked by editor Boris Johnson in the course of a bibulous lunch at a Westminster restaurant last week, is not taking his removal (to be replaced by his predecessor of a decade ago, Frank Keating) lying down.

Henderson's valedictory column recalls some of the highlights of his time reporting for the *Speccie*: the day Brian Lara scored a century at Old Trafford but Henderson missed it because he had bunked off to visit a flower show; the thrilling cup final and the Ryder cup golf where he had to crib his reports from other hacks because he'd been elsewhere on the afternoons in question. Really? Can this be true? "Thank you all for your kindness," he concludes. "I'm off to do a job where neither experience nor aptitude is required; nor, apparently, even the reviewer's presence. I'm going to become a theatre critic."

It seems the diligent "Hendo" is sore that he has had the chop while the *Spectator*'s "theatre critic" Toby Young – notorious for writing about himself and wandering out of plays before the end – carries on. "The *Spectator* is full of these people who seem proud to know nothing and only write about themselves," he says when the *Eye* calls. "Toby Young, James Delingpole, Taki, Deborah Ross, Petronella Wyatt… As Kingsley Amis said, the world is divided into w*****s and c***s. Well, Delingpole is a w****r but Young is a c**t."

No hard feelings then.

O·B·N

If you want to know what today's teenagers are thinking, you're better off reading The Spectator than The Face.

TOBY YOUNG
Torygraph

Submitted by Henry Miller

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

ONE of the most important duties of sub-editors who compile TV listings for the *Express* is to give due prominence to Dirty Des's porn channels.

The listings are contracted out to Broadcasting Data Services, a subsidiary of the ever high-minded BBC, and until recently the only guidance given by the *Express* to subs at BDS was that the channel number of Television X (Sky 970) must *always* be included, to save readers any delay in accessing Des's satellite smut.

Last week, however, they received a further "style guide" from *Express* executive Donald Edgar. "In Television X, only asterisk the dirty words – and don't overdo it. The words must be recognisable to anyone interested in such things, e.g. sh*g not s**g, but always a**l. So bitch, pussy and sluts are all acceptable."

No doubt listings subs at the *Daily Telegraph* were relieved to hear that Des has now pulled out of the race to buy their organ.

"Is it me or is Anne Robinson getting younger?"

JIMMY Goldsmith's old crony Taki was enraptured by Lady Annabel Goldsmith's memoirs, which he reviewed for the London Evening Standard. The Greek parvenu and former jailbird, who once described himself as a "soi-disant anti-semite", suggested that "had she been born a bit earlier and a German, the Führer would have awarded her the Fatherland's highest decoration for breeding beautiful, Aryan-looking children."

It seems unlikely, given that three of those children were fathered by a Jew, but once Taki is on his pet subject of eugenics there's no stopping him. He notes that the offspring of Annabel and Sir Jams "are breeding like Sir Jimmy, which is a very good thing. England needs fewer immigrants and more attractive natives".

In his drink-fuddled state, perhaps Taki has forgotten that the child he singles out for particular praise – Jemima – is married to Imran Khan. Come to that, Taki isn't an English native either, but one of those "immigrants" whom he so despises. Still, if he feels that England needs fewer people such as himself, who are we to disagree?

A PHOTO of Dame Kiri Te Kanawa with "millionaire Christopher Moran" graced last Wednesday's *Evening Standard*, alongside a gushing account of Moran's charity banquet in Chelsea at which the diva performed.

"The dinner, cooked by Michel Roux of Le Gavroche, was a feast," it reported, Jennifer's Diary-style. "The menu included crab and smoked salmon and lamb with truffled asparagus." Scrumptious!

Standard readers have often been regaled with flattering stories about Moran since his friend Veronica Wadley became editor. On 20 February Londoner's Diary noted that Lady Thorneycroft's 90th birthday party had been held at Crosby Hall, Chelsea, "currently being restored to its former glory by Christopher Moran". Ten days earlier the diary carried a gratuitous puff for the Kiri Te Kanawa banquet – describing the £1,000-a-head tickets as "cheap at the price".

But beyond describing Moran as a "millionaire", "multi-millionaire" or "property tycoon", the *Standard* seems oddly reluctant to tell readers about his financial background. It never mentions that in 1982 he became the first underwriter in 300 years to be voted out of Lloyd's of London – and disbarred for life – for "discreditable conduct"; that in 1986 he was censured by the London stock exchange for his role in the transfer of shares in PR company Good Relations; and that in 1992 he was ordered by a New York court to pay a $2m fine after the securities and exchange commission (SEC) accused him of insider dealing. He also has the possibly unique honour of having been turned down by the Tory party when he offered to fund a think tank.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"*Hollyoaks* star Joanna Taylor says she and Liverpool footballer Danny Murphy enjoy kinky S&M sessions with handcuffs and whips. Yaaaaawwwn. How much more of this dreary paddling through the murky sexual shallows of footballers' lives must we endure?" — The *Sun*, 24 March, page 11.

"Telly babe Joanna Taylor steps from the ocean — then rubs in some lotion — as she enjoys more outdoor fun… Joanna revealed she and Liverpool star Danny, 26, had sex on the bonnet of his BMW…" — The *Sun*, 24 March, page 21.

BAD NEWS for *New Statesman* editor Peter Wilby: the mag's political pundit John Kampfner is after his job.

Wilby is fully aware of the plot, however, and seems remarkably unconcerned. When *NS* proprietor Geoffrey Robinson MP mentioned recently that he had been invited to dinner at Kampfner's house, Wilby said: "He will tell you three things. First, that his name doesn't appear on the front cover often enough. Second, that he ought to be paid more. Third, that he should be made editor."

A couple of days later Robinson dropped by the office to inform Wilby that every one of his predictions had been spot-on.

O·B·N

Gordon Brown is a warm and caring man and he possesses that rare quality – lacking in so many of his colleagues – he listens. That's why Wednesday's budget saw him help pensioners and pour billions into schools and the NHS.

FIONA PHILLIPS
Daily Mirror

Submitted by Steve Joyce

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

"I DON'T know Kaufman personally [but] I fully subscribe to the Press Complaints Commission's rules on privacy," said Peter Hill, the former *Daily Star* editor now promoted to the *Daily Express*, in an *Observer* profile of Labour MP Gerald Kaufman.

Presumably Hill is looking forward to the opportunity to outline his adherence to the PCC's regulations when he prepares his defence against contempt of court charges. The attorney general has asked for proceedings to be brought against Hill and the *Star* for revealing the identities of two Premiership footballers arrested following the notorious Grosvenor House Hotel "roasting" incident last year. Neither of the footballers was charged with rape.

THE war of the weekly lads' mags rumbles on, with both sides claiming victory in the early skirmishes.

IPC says its offering, *Nuts*, launched the week before Emap's *Zoo* as a spoiler, is selling more than 200,000 copies a week. Emap retorts that IPC has shot its bolt to gain such impressive numbers, spending £6m of its £8m war chest on the launch, where Emap has spent just £2m.

With swingeing price cuts continuing, the long-term winner is hard to call. What is clear, however, is that there is much to be won. Both sides had set initial targets of 50,000 a week at launch: already the two mags between them are selling around 1.6 million copies a month, or 400,000 a week. It may make grim reading for adults, but tits, ass and the occasional rectal prolapse really are what little boys want.

While this is great news for staff at *Nuts* it's less good for IPC's other lads' mag, *Loaded*, which this month celebrates its 10th birthday. According to one insider, circulation has "collapsed" with the coming of the weeklies.

To boost morale further, IPC bosses have given the *Nuts* offices a lick of paint to cover up the sloshing lager and other manly effluvia. Unfortunately the brush quite literally stopped at the point where the *Loaded* office begins. Editor Martin Daubney is reportedly furious – and rightly so. *Loaded* has been one of IPC's premier cash cows. Its birthday bash later this month should be colourful.

M'LEARNED friends may soon be obliged to take an interest in the circumstances surrounding the departure of the *Sunday Times*'s chief political correspondent Eben Black – who was sacked for "gross misconduct and insubordination" after refusing to become the paper's new defence editor.

The real reason for Black's downfall is well known to most hacks in the parliamentary lobby and can be summed up in the words "David" and "Cracknell" – Black's immediate and notoriously insecure superior, who had been trying to get his colleague to walk the plank for some time.

Not surprisingly, the *Sunset Times* found it difficult to get a replacement, as "Crackers" has serious form. In October 2001, as deputy political editor of the *Sunday Telegraph*, he hacked into the computer of political editor Joe Murphy and tried to steal his contacts. Murphy, who had helped Cracknell get the job in the first place, was understandably furious at this betrayal. Although "Crackers" was already working out his notice prior to joining the *Sunday Times*, he had his pass withdrawn and was ordered to leave at once.

UNTIL a few months ago Barbara Amiel's columns for the *Daily Telegraph* were highly irregular – and not only in the eccentricity of their analysis and style. Sometimes whole months would pass without a single contribution from the proprietor's wife.

Now, however, she turns up on the op-ed page every Monday without fail. "Barbara's really knuckling down to it," a friend explains. "She wants to show that she's a proper working journalist. After all, she may soon be the sole breadwinner."

Alas, not everyone at the paper is pleased with her productivity. Nonagenarian cub reporter W.F. Deedes has been heard to mutter that she "isn't quite the thing" for the *Telegraph* – and is now urging his friend Veronica Wadley, editor of the London *Evening Standard*, to offer Barbara a column there instead.

This may be a sign, along with the *Telegraph*'s recent less stridently pro-Sharon editorials, that the newspaper is tiptoeing away from the Conrad Black era. Hence the irritation at the *Eye*'s suggestion last issue that when reproducing the cover of *Vanity Fair*, the *Daily Telegraph* had cravenly airbrushed out a strap-line reading "The Spectacular Rise and Fall of Conrad Black".

It hadn't. It had merely reproduced the *American* cover of *Vanity Fair* where this strap-line was the third headline story rather than the UK version where it was the lead. The Black story *was* there – by Keira Knightley's elbow.

"Don't try so hard...I want a dad, not a homey!..."

***EYE* readers will be pleased to hear that leading American hawk Richard Perle has dropped his threat to sue veteran US investigative reporter Seymour Hersh for libel.**

The *Eye* broke the story of Perle's libel suit in March 2003 (Hawkwatch, 1076). Hersh had published an article in the *New Yorker* showing that Perle helped run an investment firm, Trireme Partners. While Perle was a defence adviser to President George Bush, Trireme was also seeking to make money from investments related to the "war on terror". Hersh suggested Perle had met with veteran arms dealer Adnan Kashoggi and a Saudi businessman, and tried to exploit his links with Bush to drum up business.

Perle threatened to sue the *New Yorker* in London, where libel laws are less friendly to the press. But he announced his intention not to sue in the *New York Sun* on 12 March saying: "Lies and distortions do not constitute libel unless one can demonstrate the errors, lies and distortions are wilful."

While Perle promised to produce 90 pages of interview transcripts to show Hersh was wrong, his legal attentions may be diverted elsewhere as he is in danger of being sucked into the court cases involving Conrad Black, the Telegraph Group and Hollinger.

Perle was a director of Hollinger Digital, a subsidiary that, to the surprise of many shareholders, invested in Trireme. Perle also reportedly took £1.6m in bonuses from Hollinger, apparently without declaring them; and he seems to be one of the Hollinger directors authorising the transfer of the huge "non compete" fees to Lord Black's personal funds, rather than to the company in general.

In February Perle resigned from his official advisory post at the US Defence Policy Board so he could freely promote his new book on defeating terrorism, available for £12.99 from all good bookshops.

HACKWATCH

Publish And Be Saddamed

NEW evidence has emerged in the United States which might help explain how British newspapers got it so wrong propagating the Saddam doomsday scenario in the run-up to the Iraq war.

The US government paid millions of dollars to the Iraqi National Congress (INC) for work that apparently included placing stories about nonexistent weapons of mass destruction in the *Sunday Times*, *Times*, *Observer*, *Guardian*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Evening Standard*, *Express*, *Independent*, *Birmingham Post* and *Western Mail*.

According to documents obtained by the American newspaper firm Knight Ridder, the INC still receives $4m a year for its "information collection programme" – the scheme which Ahmed Chalabi's organisation used to pass inaccurate stories, gleaned from exiled Iraqis about Saddam's WMD, to the US department of defence. But the INC also claims responsibility for getting similar stories into newspapers.

Indeed, to justify its continued funding, in June 2002 it wrote to the US senate appropriations committee boasting of its success. It referred to 108 pieces in British and American newspapers under the heading "summary of ICP product cited in major English language news outlets worldwide (October 2001-May 2002)".

A major source for British hacks was the Iraqi civil engineer Adnan Al-Haideri, who claimed to have built underground bio-warfare labs and worked on an Iraqi nuclear programme. The INC list points to an article by Marie Colvin in the *Sunday Times* (17 March 2002) headlined "Saddam's arsenal revealed" and publicising Al–Haideri's claims. Colvin said a second defector had revealed the existence of seven mobile germ labs "disguised as milk trucks" and quoted an unnamed official as saying the information was "high grade". Not that high grade, it turns out.

The INC also claims credit for two articles by Damian Whitworth in the *Times* in December 2001 which uncritically reported Al-Haideri's claims "about the acceleration of President Saddam Hussein's work on chemical, biological and nuclear weapons".

In December 2002 Andrew Gumbel of the *Independent* and Toby Moore in the *Express* also reported Al-Haideri's claims without scepticism. The INC cites Ben Fenton in the *Telegraph* on the same subject, under the banner "Defector tells of Saddam's nuclear arms". At least the *Telegraph* noted that "Mr al-Haideri's claims have not been confirmed by intelligence sources in Washington".

Christopher Hitchens is another British hack on the INC list. In his March 2002 comment piece in the *Evening Standard* he wrote that Saddam was "within a measurable distance of acquiring doomsday materials". He went on to praise the "heroic" Chalabi as "the symbolic and actual head of the Iraqi opposition" and his "information concerning the whereabouts of the Ba'ath party's weapons of mass destruction". The INC also claims credit for Hitchens' piece in that month's *Guardian*, which said Saddam "certainly has nerve gas and chemical weapons".

Hitchens cited the discredited exile Khidir Hamza to show that Iraq would soon have nuclear weapons, and used an INC source to show how Saddam was linked to the September 11 attacks.

This latter claim, the INC says, also appeared in a March 2002 piece by Toby Harnden in the *Daily Telegraph* which said Saddam "armed Bin Laden and funded Al Qaeda allies". Relying on INC information, Harnden reported that "Iraq sent conventional and perhaps biological or chemical weapons to Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan".

And so on. While US journals have taken publication of the INC list seriously and reexamined their INC-linked material, in Britain the response so far has been... silence.

IN THE TEAROOM

STAFF at Conservative central office have certainly taken to heart party chairman Lord Saatchi's orders to conduct themselves as if they were at Bletchley Park during WWII. It's not just that the main planks of the party's policy remain a riddle wrapped in an enigma: they've all taken to communicating with one another in unfathomable code, which sometimes leads to grotesque misunderstandings.

Take, for instance, the Tories' project to recruit parliamentary candidates from "untraditional backgrounds". Under Theresa May this meant picking more women, more blacks and Asians and rather fewer barristers and merchant bankers. It also meant ditching the pinstripes and tie whenever possible. The Tory party, Ms May used to insist, should look more like the society it seeks to represent. At any rate it should try to look a lot less like the "nasty party" it was perceived to be.

But after a few churns through the Bletchley-style bombes, the term "untraditional" now invariably translates as "gay". Constituency associations all over the home counties are frankly puzzled why central office is so keen that they should pick homosexuals to represent them. One local bigwig has urged more discrimination: camper candidates should be concentrated where they will have maximum electoral effect – in "seaside resorts" for instance.

Other associations, such as Holborn & St Pancras, have entered enthusiastically into the spirit of the thing. Holborn's Margot James is the party's first "openly lesbian" parliamentary candidate. But in all other respect's she's boilerplate Conservative: nostalgic for the glory years of Thatcher, a brash 80s PR biz success story and so on. The problem is that no one who has observed Tory politics closely over the past 20 years sees anything the least bit "untraditional" about gay Conservatives. The party has always had more than its fair share of (albeit closeted) gay MPs and activists. And despite manifold hypocrisies, it's also always managed to pick up a surprisingly large slice of the pink vote. If the Tories have an image problem, it's not that they're too straight.

Which is probably why the party's private polls are showing that the strategy isn't working. Michael Howard, it seems, is jolly good at appealing to Conservatives... not bad at coaxing back lapsed Conservatives, but utterly pisspoor at persuading anyone not already so inclined to become a Conservative.

And what's worse is that Howard is now set to fall into an elephant trap set for him by the prime minister. Tony Blair has calculated that the best way to establish in the public mind that the Tories are the same rancid crew the punters so enjoyed kicking out in '97 and kept out in 2001 is to provoke them into a prolonged Eurosceptic wrangle of the kind that so alienates the floating voter. The forthcoming row about the European constitution offers ideal bait. Will Howard be smart enough to sidestep it? Of course not.

'Quintus Slide'

THE anniversary of the Good Friday agreement in Northern Ireland is being greeted by (yet another) pledge of imminent progress from Tony Blair. Alas, his confidence that the IRA will commemorate the Easter Rising by going out of business isn't shared by President George Bush.

Ahead of November's presidential election in the US, Dubya will make a now routine "historic" overnight visit to Ireland, during which he'll spend 12 hours in a castle as close as possible to Shannon airport. Ten hours will be spent sleeping and two will be spent at summit meetings with EU leaders and Bertie Ahern before the all-important photo op. Bush will be photographed wearing a nice green hat for the benefit of the electors back home before flying off on Airforce One.

This is bad news for Ulster Unionist leader David Trimble, who with the backing of Downing Street had pleaded with the US president to make a stopover in Northern Ireland – even just a few minutes on the tarmac at Belfast International to shake hands with the "peacemakers".

Alas, Bush's advisers have ruled this out, preferring the president to keep his distance. Perhaps Blair should invite his new best friend Colonel Gaddafi to fly in instead... and politely ask Gerry for the explosives back.

*"Finally, would you like your views to represent... **A.** 2,000 or **B.** 10,000...?"*

MEMBERS of the Scottish affairs select committee in the Commons take their job very seriously and are outraged if anyone suggests they are irrelevant because there is now a parliament in Scotland.

On the eve of Gordon Brown's budget, nine MPs took the trouble to travel all the way to the distant island of Islay to investigate the vitally important issue of collecting duty on bottles of Scottish whisky. Nine MPs managed to make it to a hotel on the island where they earnestly collected evidence, and six of the nine – chairwoman Irene Adams (Lab, Paisley North), Alistair Carmichael (Lib Dem, Orkney and Shetland), David Hamilton (Lab, Midlothian), John Lyons (Lab, Strathkelvin and Bearsden), Ann Mckechin (Lab, Glasgow, Maryhill) and John MacDougall (Lab, Fife Central) – went on to the independent Bruichladdich distillery where they were greeted with conventional Scottish hospitality as they gathered yet more evidence on the subject.

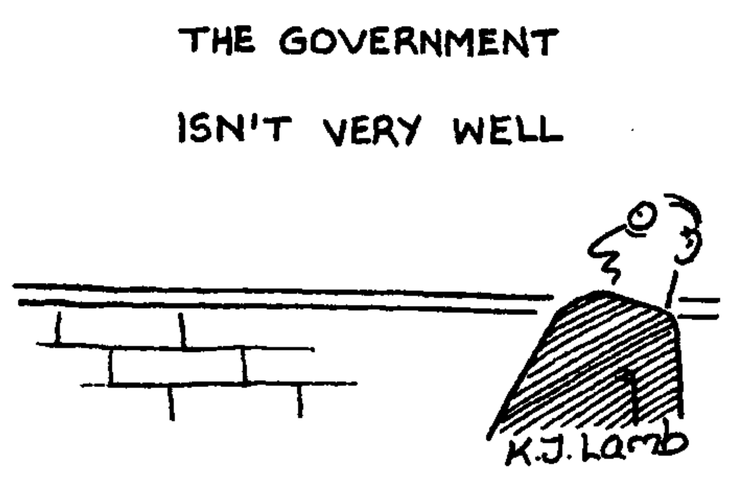
In conversation in that jovial atmosphere, most of the MPs seemed to deplore the idea that the whisky industry should collect its own duty. They took the view that that onerous and often fraud-infested area was best left to Customs & Excise. Imagine their horror the following day when Gordon revealed in his budget that he was imposing mandatory "strip stamps" on Scotch whisky bottles.

The stamps will be the responsibility of the distillers and so bring huge savings in time and effort to excise officers, so many thousands of whose staff Gordon wants to sack. But the decision brought real anxiety to the members of the select committee who wonder why they bother with gruelling trips north in earnest pursuit of a Scottish issue long after that redoubtable Scot Gordon Brown has made up his mind what to do about it.

AN alliance of leading lawyers and 29 women's and community groups has asked the Bichard inquiry, set up after the Soham murders, to broaden its inquiry into the Ian Huntley debacle.

Home secretary David Blunkett initiated Bichard to "urgently inquire into child protection procedures" in Humberside and Cambridgeshire

Government Health Warning



police forces and "in particular to assess the effectiveness of the relevant intelligence-based record keeping, the vetting practices in those forces since 1995 and information sharing with other agencies".

What the inquiry should really be looking at, the group said, was why Huntley was never prosecuted for any of his previous attacks – a disturbing factor in many rape and murder cases. The inquiry team said it was not for it to broaden the home secretary's remit. But what did the home office itself say when the issue of failure to prosecute in such cases was first raised in January?

In a letter to Women Against Rape, it said: "The government recognises that rape and sexual assault are not to be tolerated and work is being done to address it" – including, er... launching the Bichard inquiry.

WHILE Iain Duncan Smith is reduced to broadcasting to half a dozen viewers on Johnny Vaughan's BBC3 show and flogging his novel to even fewer people, better things have befallen his former chief executive Mark MacGregor.

MacGregor was controversially sacked last year so that IDS could bring in his own man, Barry Legg. The rancour at his dismissal led many to point the finger of blame at MacGregor when details of the Betsygate scandal were subsequently leaked to BBC journalist Michael Crick. Whatever the truth of that, MacGregor certainly gave evidence against his one-time boss when he appeared before Sir Philip Mawer, though the parliamentary commissioner for standards cleared IDS and his wife of the most serious charges against him.

Not only is MacGregor now in charge of Steven Norris's mayoral campaign in London, but he has also made the shortlist for Jonathan Aitken's old constituency Thanet South, a seat he fought and failed to secure in 2001. Local activists are preparing themselves for the mother of all battles between MacGregor and another would-be candidate, Emma Swann, who is rather alarmingly described as "a mini Ann Widdecombe".

TO LITTLE fanfare and even less applause, Andrew Rosindell MP has quietly been elevated to the position of vice-chairman of the Conservative party following the resignation of David Curry. He will now be working alongside fellow vice-chairman Boris Johnson. Welcome to the Bozzer and Rozzer show.

This is a remarkable turn-around for the young MP for Romford. Rosindell was widely believed to embody the worst elements of what Theresa May called the "Nasty Party" and has the track record to back it up – former chairman of the Young Monday Club, who only resigned his membership of the adult version when leader Iain Duncan Smith compelled him to do so.

If Rosindell ever feels the need to seek counsel from one who has been there before, he can turn to none other than Jeffrey Archer, himself a former vice-chairman of the party. Rosindell has long been teased about his physical resemblance to Lord Archole, and the *Eye* now learns that the disgraced peer has been in regular contact with Rosindell's office lately, eager to help in any way he can. Can it be long before the master-storyteller is brought back on to the hustings?

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

IF Britain adopts the new European Union constitution with its trans-national arrest warrant, will journalists ever be safe again to expose chicanery in Brussels?

The question is not so far fetched given the behaviour in recent days of OLAF, the European Union's inept fraud-busting arm. While it admits that fraud is actually *increasing* within the EU institutions, it has just ordered the arrest of a journalist with a successful track record in exposing EU scams.

At OLAF's behest, at the end of last month Hans-Martin Tillack, Brussels-based correspondent of the German magazine *Die Stern*, was arrested by armed Belgian police officers who seized his computers, address books and files. He was held for 10 hours without access to a lawyer while his office and home were raided by six officers. "They asked me to tell them who my sources were. I replied that was something I would never do. Now they have all my sensitive files, so I suppose they'll find out anyway," said Tillack. "The police said I was lucky I wasn't in Burma or central Africa, where journalists get the real treatment."

Treatment is in fact quite bad enough in the EU. Consider the "evidence" against Tillack. According to stammering press officers who held a parody of a briefing, the journalist is suspected of offering OLAF officers bribes to secure confidential documents. "But, er, we haven't yet got any evidence," an OLAF official muttered.

The lengths to which senior EU officials will go to derail Tillack's run of scoops on Brussels corruption is only eclipsed by the grip these same officials seem to have on British journalists. Very few reported the Tillack arrest, perhaps afraid it might upset their regular suckling from their wet nurses in the European Commission. Ian Black of the *Guardian* whimpered to colleagues that "I might write a piece for the media pages" only to be trumped by the Press Association's Brussels hack Geoff Meade, who wrote up a bland press release on the arrest written by a mate at the International Federation of Journalists.

Tillack's story is instructive. It started 20 months ago when an Italian press officer at OLAF, Alessandro Butticé, was apparently so upset at information leaking from his institution that he set about trying to destroy Tillack. He accused him of offering bribes to OLAF officials – a slander he circulated in an internal email. More than a year later, Butticé was ordered by the EU ombudsman to apologise publicly for his baseless slur.

That should have been the end of the matter. But OLAF clearly couldn't stick Tillack's continuing run of exposés and so asked the police to arrest him. Tillack tells the *Eye* that he believes Franz-Hermann Bruener, the German magistrate who heads OLAF, is most likely to have been behind the recent move, along with OLAF's 20-month vendetta over his non-existent bribery, even though the public face of the witch-hunt has been Butticé.

Perhaps Bruener didn't like a stinging attack on him written by Tillack in *Die Stern* last November. Either way, Bruener first denied on German television that OLAF had had anything to do with the police investigation into Tillack. Then, 24 hours later after Belgian prosecutors said they had indeed been acting on OLAF's instructions, Bruener admitted that he *had* started the investigation.

If the EU arrest warrant comes into force, how many more successful investigative hacks will get a knock on the door?

DOWN ON THE FARM

THE Countryside And Rights Of Way Act (CROW) (the so-called "right to roam") comes on stream this summer, but has its downside in a minority who see it as a licence to treat those who work in the countryside with contempt – as evidenced at a recent gathering of farmers in north Wales.

One farmer described how he had seen a group of youths trying to climb a cliff on his land. When he called up to them that it was dangerous and liable to crumble, they shouted abuse, kicked down one of his walls and broke a fence. An elderly neighbour, running out to remonstrate with a group chasing his sheep, had a heart attack and died. Another farmer, seeing "ramblers" stealing his property, rang the police who, when they arrived, only wanted to confiscate the shotgun he used to keep foxes away from his lambs, lest he might be tempted to use it if the intruders came back.

A particular concern of several farmers was the reckless way in which some visitors allow dogs to create mayhem. When one protested to boys who were encouraging their dogs to chase his sheep, they went off to complain to their father who promptly brought back a second dog to join the fun. Another reported how so many visitors had allowed their dogs to foul freely over his land that, when this was noted by an inspector from Tesco, he lost his "organic accreditation". Uncontrolled dogs are not only a menace to farm animals and wildlife but can spread disease, as in the current epidemic of bovine TB.

A final concern was the way farmers are now exposed to compensation claims from anyone who comes on to their land, even if the injury is scarcely something the farmer could have avoided, such as a branch falling from a tree. Even if visitors damage themselves while pulling hay bales off a rick, as recently happened on one farm, the farmer is still liable to pay compensation. This has contributed to a huge increase in public liability insurance, which can now amount to thousands of pounds a year, which may not sound much, but when hill farm incomes average less than £10,000, it makes a huge difference.

'Muckspreader'

HIGH PRINCIPALS

LECTURERS' union officers who leaked comments by college auditors about "significant errors" in the accounts at their college are about to be out of a job.

Last year Skelmersdale and Ormskirk College in Lancashire announced that it would have to make up to 40 redundancies due to a £1m overspend. But having hammered that number down to three managers and six teaching staff, and with enough managers and one lecturer taking voluntary redundancy, Natfhe union activists have discovered that the people now to be made redundant are, er, them.

The branch chair, the health and safety rep, a former branch committee member and two other Natfhe members have been identified by the college as likely candidates for redundancy.

In May 2002 the accountancy firm PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC) resigned as the college auditor. Staff were told this was simply a routine quibble over fees. But the union later got its hands on letters from PWC referring to "significant errors" in the accounts and saying: "We are frankly now at a position where we are unable to place reliance on what Richard Griffiths [the director of finance] says, which makes our continuance as auditors difficult to say the least."

A Natfhe spokesman said: "We felt we had no option but to alert the local Learning and Skills Council – the body that funds the college – to the nature of the very serious allegations… We are hopeful that at last some action may finally be taken, but it could be too late for those members who are being made to pay the price."

THE police investigation into a possible £2m fraud at Sandwell College in the West Midlands (*Eye* 1096) continues, but staff are already feeling the effect of the lost finances.

The college has announced plans to shed 100 jobs and three buildings in an effort to get back into the black after sinking £12m into debt. But isn't this scam a failure of management, not staff?

A TALE OF TWO BANKERS

AFTER 28 years' loyal and award-winning service with the NatWest Bank, Robin Ibrahim was rewarded not with a golden handshake but the sack.

Ever since he left school in 1973, Mr Ibrahim had enjoyed an exemplary record of trust and promotion through managerial ranks – until he was suddenly accused of forging a customer's signature on paperwork belonging to one of his sales staff.

Mr Ibrahim had found the signed letter in his colleague's office and faxed it off, as requested, to the Business Quality Unit. The paper related to a life cover policy, and without it the salesman stood to lose some £2,000 in commission and even more on his quarterly bonus. A bonus holiday in Bali was also under threat. Nevertheless suspicion fell on Mr Ibrahim, the salesman's supervisor, because investigators claimed that the salesman was on holiday at the time and so could not have forged the signature.

The investigators also claimed that Mr Ibrahim had been lying when he said he had had two telephone conversations with the salesman on the day in question about the letter. The salesman had denied any knowledge of calls and the investigators suggested "there was a lack of call logging data".

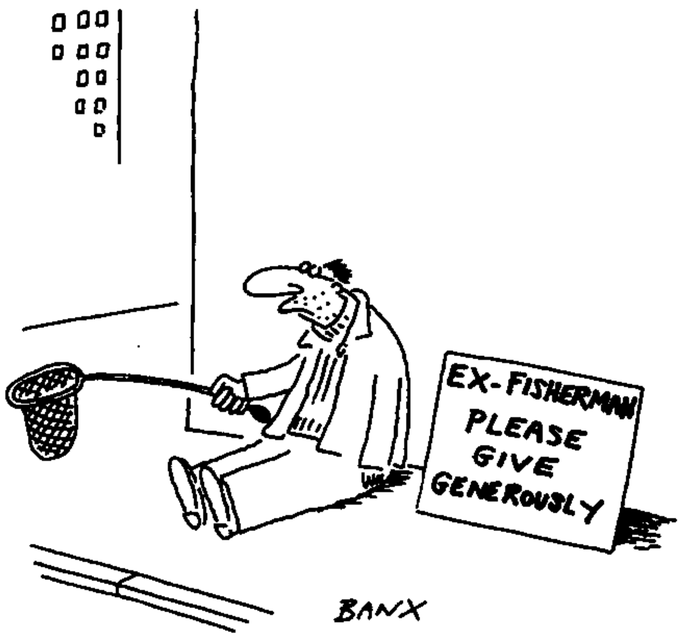
In fact telephone logs obtained by Mr Ibrahim's lawyers under disclosure showed that he had indeed had conversations with the salesman that day. Furthermore, the holiday log, checked on the first day of the investigation, showed that the salesman was at work and not on holiday. And handwriting tests, which could have exonerated Mr Ibrahim at the beginning of the inquiry, were not carried out until after he had been sacked – by when the bank had apparently lost the original document.

Last month an industrial tribunal found Mr Ibrahim had been unfairly dismissed, ruling that the investigation was fundamentally flawed and based on false and highly prejudicial information. The panel said it was "mystified" how the bank could have made such a devastating blunder about the salesman's holiday dates.

Mr Ibrahim is likely to secure the maximum £60,000 award an employment tribunal can make, but it is nothing compared to what he has lost at the hands of NatWest. The tribunal was told that Mr Ibrahim was suddenly thrown into "professional, financial and personal meltdown" by the employer he had served so loyally for decades. So far NatWest has not apologised. As the bank itself boasts: "There must be another way."

MATT BARRETT, chief executive of Barclays' Bank, received a 66 percent pay rise last year, making his total take-home pay almost £5m, according to the bank's annual report.

Happily Mr Barrett need not worry about the government blocking the deal. When Patricia Hewitt, industry secretary, responded to demands for new laws to stop excessive boardroom pay, she said on 25 February: "I have considered very carefully the question of whether to introduce further legislation in this area and have concluded that it is not necessary at this stage."



ITV

Murder City (ITV)
Murder In Suburbia (ITV)

SCENES we seldom see: two people watching TV, and one of them saying to the other, "You know, what I really fancy watching is a new cop show. We haven't had any of those in ages."

Cut to: ITV Network Centre, where the putative producers of **Murder City** are pitching to a man with a beard. "We've got this great idea for a cop show. Amanda Donohoe out of *LA Law*. Kris Marshall, the wacky gurning one from *My Family*."

"Great," says Man With Beard. "I'll take six times one hour." "Th-thank you," say Putative Producers, who weren't expecting it to be this easy. "Don't you want to know anything else?" "Is it gritty?" The producers nod. "Wobbly cameras?" Nod. "Slick production values, with most scenes shot either at night or in the rain and lots of flashy sound effects?" Nod. "No, don't need to know anything else," says Man With Beard, who has already commissioned a fluffy new cop show, **Murder In Suburbia**. Now he has a gritty new cop show, and that completes the set.

Murder City started out life as *Murder Squad*, but it could have been *Murder Goat* or *Murder Radish* for all the difference it makes. This one is as generic as these shows get. Amanda Donohoe plays DI Susan Alembic with a look of almost permanent surprise – not because anything surprising happens, but because she appears to have had a new pair of eyebrows installed and they haven't bedded in yet.

Kris Marshall is Det Sergeant Luke Stone, and your first thought is: how did this idiot ever get promoted? He is supposed to be anarchic and unconventional, which is to say he wears silly ties and gurns a lot. Tim Woodward is their growly boss with a bolted-on Welsh accent: he's forever a breath away from shouting "In my office – now!" Last week someone nearly said it for him. "Turner's office – now!" Maybe they were giving him a week off.

The plot, as even ITV's most exhausted viewers will have worked out, revolves around murder, and there are usually a couple a day to solve. The city is London, which means the squad works out of a groovy converted warehouse rather than a police station (so 1990s).

Last week's episode kicked off with obligatory shots of a mutilated woman's body. "Whoever did this has a lot of blood on 'em," chuckled Marshall over the ketchup-spattered corpse. But it was the day's other brutal slaying that really caught the squad's imagination. This turned out to be a serial killer who had been killed by his Filipino wife-slave and replaced by a non-serial killer with a tattooed facial birthmark, all of which had been covered up by a now retired detective who was, with absolute inevitability, described as "one of the old school".

No one believed any of this rubbish except for Kris Marshall, who stopped larking about for a moment to put on a serious, gritty face and extract confessions from everyone concerned in about 30 seconds. Meanwhile the Filipino wife-slave had made the mistake of trying to escape on the Docklands Light Railway, thus obliterating all remaining suspension of disbelief. In real life, of course, she would be stuck there still.

There was one good joke: Kris Marshall's mobile ringtone was the theme tune to the *Sweeney*. But this wasn't quite enough to keep you going for 90 minutes.

Murder City is the same as everything you have seen before, except worse. Donohoe, Woodward and the rest don't play the content, they play the style; Marshall oozing self-consciousness and self-satisfaction. Only Ross Kemp of recent memory has acted this poorly on TV. Man With Beard should sign him to a long-term contract immediately.

By comparison *Murder In Suburbia* is almost presentable. Its central tenet, that people murder each other in the suburbs as well, might even be fresh were it not only an infinitesimally small twist on thousands of earlier shows. But again, calamitously tedious scripting cripples the project from the first scene.

Caroline Catz, who in other shows has been genuinely good, is saddled with the hoity toity part, complete with librarian's hairstyle, while Lisa Faulkner is her rough 'n' ready sidekick. Yes, they're the *Eye*'s parody cops Chalk And Cheese, and after an hour's unbearable bickering they finally solve some crimes. It may seem unduly optimistic to suggest such a thing, but there must be people working in British TV who can come up with something better than this.

'Couch Potato'

A VERY BIRTIST COUP (PT 94)

WHILE Dalek-fanciers still wait to see whether John Birt's great friend Lord Burns wants to be chairman of the BBC, they have already got the next best thing with the appearance of Patricia Hodgson's name on the shortlist.

A former Conservative parliamentary candidate, Hodgson began her career at the corporation as company secretary in the 1980s. It was she who led Alasdair Milne to his execution when the governors bowed to government pressure and sacked him as director-general.

Hodgson then flourished when Birt himself landed the job, going on to run the hated "policy and planning unit" which Birt used to impose his grand vision on a recalcitrant Beeb. Together with another Birt protégé, Matthew Bannister, Hodgson compiled the hated Birtian blueprint, *Extending Choice*, which did so much to undermine the morale of BBC staff. She was also responsible for the decision to dispense with Peter Menneer, head of audience research, after he had defended BBC Radio from an assault by Birt and various governors, including buffoonish chairman Marmaduke "Dukey" Hussey.

For those who remember her from those days at Broadcasting House, only the installation of Alastair Campbell or the return of the Armani-wearing, croak-voiced Dalek himself as chairman could prove more unpopular. Hodgson's harsher critics sometimes observed that she looked as if "she was sculpted from deep frozen Oil of Ulay".

AS *Eye* readers will know, Abbey National chairman Lord Burns is a great friend and admirer of Lord Birt. But even the inventor of Birtspeak himself would struggle to match Burns' latest explanation for why Abbey has lost squillions of pounds of investors' money under his stewardship.

In the preface to Abbey's newly issued shareholder review, Burns offers this reassuring message: "The main reason for the overall loss before tax of £686 million that we are reporting is that we've done so well with our strategy for the Portfolio Business Unit."

If that's success, what would failure look like? No wonder, on the same page, Burns says that one of his main aims is "to turn banking on its head".

I-SKY

Sir Isaac Vivian Alexander Richards was born in Antigua in 1952. King Viv still holds the record for the most sixes hit at Test level (84) and the most Test runs in a year (1,710). He captained the West Indies and played for Somerset and Glamorgan, and is currently chairman of the board of selectors for the West Indies, who begin a Test series against England on Thursday, broadcast exclusively on Sky Sports.

– The Sunday Times

DUMB BRITAIN

Chiltern FM, drivetime show

Darren Lee: Shiraz, Chardonnay and Chablis are all names of what?

Contestant: Footballers' wives.

Talksport, breakfast show

Presenter: Which Scotsman discovered penicillin in 1928?

Contestant: Alexander Penicillin.

BBC Radio 2, Steve Wright's Big Quiz

Steve Wright: After this year, when is the next leap year?

Contestant: Erm... 2007?

National Lottery Jetset, BBC1

Eamonn Holmes: What does the French phrase "Je t'aime" mean?

Contestant: Goodbye.

MEDIA NEWS

FOLLOWING its success in getting a gay sex scene cut from *Footballers' Wives*, the *Daily Star* has been running a noisy campaign to keep same-sexers off the BBC and ITV.

"Now Corrie Does Sick Sex" it thundered indignantly on learning that *Coronation Street* would show a gay kiss between Todd Grimshaw and Karl Foster. It also claimed that the vast majority of its readers wanted a ban on these "sick TV romps".

If the *Star* thinks snogging is "sick sex", one wonders how it would describe the antics featured in certain other publications — not least the gay magazine *Attitude* which was founded and is still owned by Richard "Dirty" Desmond. Odder still is the fact that the paper started its crusade against homosexuality on TV ("Ban it Because it's Sick") in the very same week that one of Dirty Des's Jersey-based companies, RHF Television, launched a "Gay TV" porn channel on Sky Digital.

Shome mishtake? Not at all. The *Star* ardently believes that "gay romps" should be banned from terrestrial TV – and thus remain the exclusive preserve of channels from which Dirty Des can make money. Given Ofcom's stringent regulations, however, it's a fair bet the sex on his new Gay TV will be, well, rather limp.

NO newspaper has been louder in its condemnation of online "betting exchanges" – such as the hugely successful Betfair – than the *Sun*. It has encouraged the government to crack down on "internet betting exchanges on which crooks can offer tempting bets", adding that "betting exchanges are undermining the UK's reputation for bookmaking integrity". Words like "scam" and "cheats" are bandied about.

Clearly this campaign is a genuinely altruistic attempt to protect consumers' interests, and has nothing to do with the fact that News International owns the rival Skybet – which offers punters the chance to lose their shirts by betting directly through their Sky Digibox instead.

GOING LIVE

THERE was little to be learnt when BBC1 *Breakfast* went live to Gaza on the day Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin was assassinated in an Israeli missile attack.

As Bill Turnbull told viewers: "These are live pictures from Gaza – where very little is taking place."

"The crack house is more fashionable nowadays"

THE NEOPHILIACS

"South-west could be the new Champagne." — *Bristol Evening Post.*

"Why blueberries are the new black." — *Observer Food Monthly.*

"Duck is the new chicken." — *The Nation's Favourite Food*, BBC2

"Curvy is the new thin." — *Voyeur*, Virgin Blue's in-flight magazine.

"On BBC1, old is the new new." — Matt Wells, *Guardian.*

"China is not the new Japan." — The *Times.*

"Krakow, the new Rome." — *Guardian* travel supplement.

"Bingo halls — they're the new nightclubs." — Chris Moyles, Radio 1.

"Is spiritualism the new bingo?" — *Daily Echo*, Southampton.

"Is fourth the new first?" — Des Lynam, *The Premiership*. ITV.

"Are deer the new mink?" — *Shooting Times.*

Legal News

WEDNESDAY 24 March was clearly a very busy day for members of the judiciary and the legal profession, as none of the former and very few of the latter were able to spare the time to celebrate the life and work of the distinguished solicitor Peter Carter-Fuck at his memorial service in the Temple.

Attendance was restricted mainly to members of the firm of solicitors that still bears his name, a few libel barristers whose wallets he fattened immeasurably over the years – and Neil and Christine Hamilton. So sparse was the turn-out that whoever organised the notice in the *Times* was reduced to including the names of people who weren't even there!

No doubt overcome by grief, none of his former partners could bring themselves to speak in his memory though Richard Hartley QC managed to tell the congregation that Carter-Fuck "was not universally loved".

CEEFUX

"SOUP – I will not step in, says Minister."

— *Headline on Ceefax, 23 March.*

WORLD OF HYPE

THE PR catastrophe that was the launch of Dasani, Coca Cola's bottled water from Sidcup, just got funnier and funnier.

After the derision that greeted news that Dasani was just like Del Boy Trotter's "Peckham Spring", the company hired to promote it in the UK, LA Promotions, opted for a massive push that would have flooded London and Manchester with free samples.

The company imported Dasani-branded Mitsubishi jeeps and even had uniforms made up for 100 promotional staff. Alas, the brilliant campaign had to be pulled when it was revealed that the company was about to give the public four million bottles of water containing illegally high levels of a cancer-causing chemical.

WILL they never learn? Despite our constant warnings about his dismal track record (see *Eye* 1096), Lord Bell continues to pick up contracts from governments and self-important businessmen.

The latest challenge entrusted to his company Bell Pottinger is the task of selling democracy to the Iraqis. Although he has no plans to put his life on the line by actually travelling to Iraq, Bell reassures inquirers that he will be "masterminding the campaign in London".

Another to enlist the services of Margaret Thatcher's former "PR guru" is Ely Calil, alleged to be one of the men behind the plane full of mercenaries, weapons and cash that was detained last month in Zimbabwe. As we reported in the last *Eye*, this convoy may or may not have been *en route* to Equatorial Guinea to remove sitting President Obiang and install Calil's friend Severo Moto, currently in exile in Spain. The Lebanese-born businessmen has recruited Bell to help him rebut these charges.

Presumably Calil will be hoping for better results than the *Daily Telegraph*'s owner, Hollinger, which hired Bell last December only to dismiss him a month later. During his brief spell in charge of the account, Bell was charged with "depersonalising" the colossal ego of Black and his private spending habits from the good name of Hollinger. "The assumption that the *Telegraph* titles are available for sale is not true," Bell explained, "so we will try and play down the speculation." Speculation duly swelled – not least because the assumption was indeed true – and Hollinger dispensed with Bell's services after only a month.

If Tinker Bell can work the same magic in Iraq as he did for the election campaigns of Herman Buchi in Chile and F.W. de Klerk in South Africa, and can do for Calil's profile what he did for Hollinger and John Birt, surely it can't be long before Saddam Hussein is restored to power.

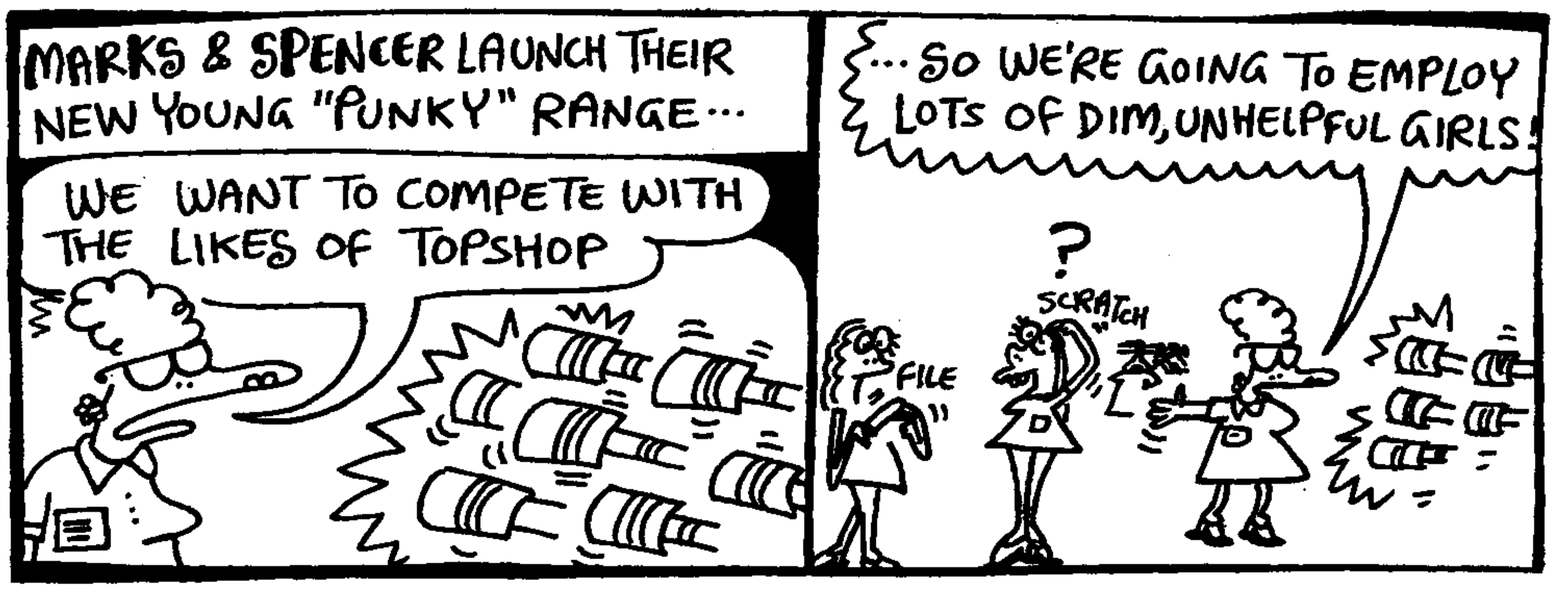
FANCY THAT!

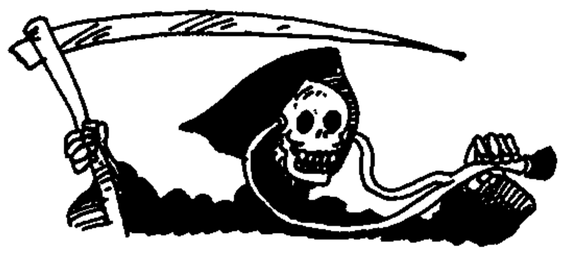
"Residents in the villages around Wana have been asked to move away from the area through loudspeakers set up in mosques."

— BBCi coverage of Pakistani military action against Al Qaeda suspects, 18 March.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER


MARKS & SPENCER LAUNCH THEIR NEW YOUNG "PUNKY" RANGE...
WE WANT TO COMPETE WITH THE LIKES OF TOPSHOP
...SO WE'RE GOING TO EMPLOY LOTS OF DIM, UNHELPFUL GIRLS!
?
SCRATCH
FILE



DOING THE ROUNDS

THE absurd nine-day suspension of Nottingham brain surgeon Terence Hope over an alleged "soup and croutons" incident only served to highlight the general shambles that is the department of health's policy on the suspension of doctors.

Last December, just nine years after it was asked, the DoH finally produced guidance on the question. It was forced by a national audit office report last year which found that suspension of around 200 doctors a year is often "haphazard and badly handled" and costs the NHS £29m.

The new guidance applies to England only and aims to abandon the suspension culture, prohibiting "gardening leave" and allowing only for immediate exclusion in extreme circumstances (usually on the grounds of patient safety). There is no mention of soup and croutons.

In fact the truth about suspensions rarely surfaces immediately. Suspended doctors are ordered to remain silent by their chief executive or medical director, and so instead talk to their insurance organisation and lawyer. Far from protecting patients, unnecessary suspensions do quite the reverse by forcing the remaining staff to take on extra operations and outpatient clinics. Rarely is a case for suspension ever proven.

A study of 250 suspensions by the Society of Clinical Psychiatrists found that less than a third involved alleged professional incompetence and only 11 instances were proven. Yet the average period of exclusion of a doctor is 47 weeks, and only 40 percent ever return to their old jobs. The stress of unnecessary suspensions and false accusations can cause marital break-up, early retirement and even suicide. And the managers who order the suspensions are never held to account. They can allege what they like without fear of comeback.

Suspensions often happen on ideological grounds to doctors who oppose government policy or management targets. Whistleblowers are far more likely to be suspended than those about whom they raise the alarm. According to the health department's guidance, any suspension beyond two weeks has to be formalised with the National Clinical Assessment Authority (NCAA) and, if an internal investigation fails to resolve the issue, the NCAA will step in with a full assessment.

The rationale is that the NCAA has the expertise to resolve even the most complex cases. But in practice NCAA intervention may achieve little. In April 2003 Andrew Ezsias, a consultant oral and maxillofacial surgeon, was suspended by North Glamorgan NHS Trust after several previous attempts to get rid of him. These date back to a clandestine investigation into his competency in 1998, a trust inquiry in 2001, an attempted referral to the Royal College of Surgeons in 2001 and an investigation by the NCAA in 2002. All of these cleared him on the issue of competency and spurious allegations of bullying and harassment against a colleague in 2002 were dismissed. So why was he later suspended?

Mr Ezsias' crime, it appears, was to try to do what he was appointed for in 1998: to overhaul the much criticised head and neck cancer services. However, he soon found that the trust had little understanding of the requirements and commitments needed to establish such highly complex surgery, particularly the free tissues transfer. Wary of the fate of the Bristol heart unit, where staff struggled to do highly complex child heart surgery without the relevant expertise and resources, Ezsias stipulated important conditions for manpower, training, roles and remits of staff and continuity of care that he would need to see in place to become lead clinician. These were ignored. His repeated concerns about the shortcomings of the service made him an enemy of the trust and he has been harassed ever since.

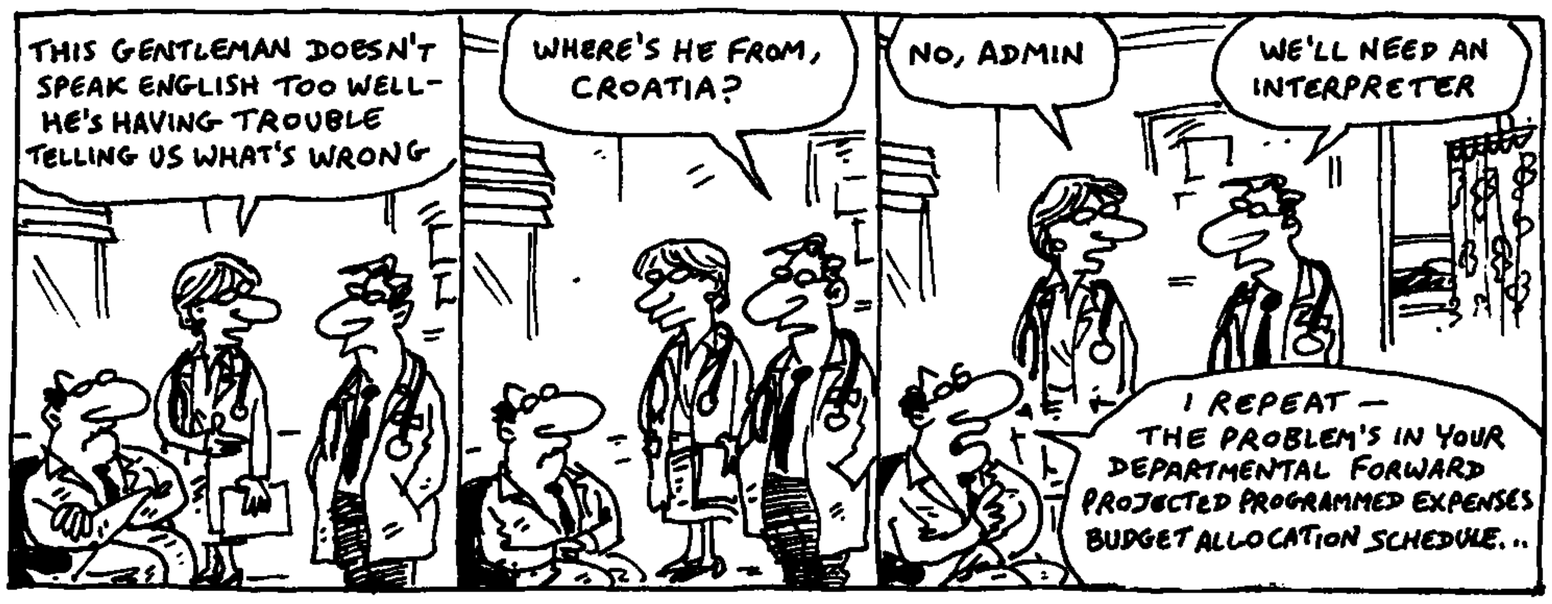
The NCAA assessment of the service in 2002 was headed by chief executive Alastair Scotland. Although the report admits that "the original contact we had from you did focus on the clinical work of one consultant" [Ezsias], he was denied access to the NCAA investigation and Scotland even refused to disclose the report to him.

Ezsias had to warn the NCAA that it would be referred under the data protection act before a copy of the report landed on his desk. It came down largely on the side of Ezsias, recommending many of the improvements he had been seeking. Yet the report has been shelved and the only major change to the service has been the continued suspension of one of its most valued surgeons.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY


THIS GENTLEMAN DOESN'T SPEAK ENGLISH TOO WELL- HE'S HAVING TROUBLE TELLING US WHAT'S WRONG
WHERE'S HE FROM, CROATIA?
NO, ADMIN
WE'LL NEED AN INTERPRETER
I REPEAT — THE PROBLEM'S IN YOUR DEPARTMENTAL FORWARD PROJECTED PROGRAMMED EXPENSES BUDGET ALLOCATION SCHEDULE...

SIGNAL FAILURES

THE light-rail system which opened in Nottingham last month could be Britain's last new one for a long time because the concept has been strangled by the private finance initiative (PFI) and deregulation.

Light rail uses short trains that travel through streets and around sharp corners, like trams, as well as on normal rail tracks. New systems aren't cheap but their overall benefits outweigh the costs. The high quality of light rail is why so many continental cities have it – and why Britain largely shuns it.

The UK is supposedly the fourth largest economy in the world, yet transport in many of our cities resembles that in the third world. And it will continue to do so thanks to "new" Labour, which pretends that urban transport problems can be solved by buses simply because they're cheaper than light rail. The unpalatable fact – that many people won't use buses but are happy to use trains – is ignored.

Local authorities who provide the impetus for each light-rail scheme are forced into complicated tendering where private consortia (involving *Eye* favourites like Carillion, Amey and Serco) bid to design, build and operate a system. As the government expects the private sector to shoulder the risk of things going wrong, the consortia simply add ever bigger margins to their bids.

Every existing English light-rail system needs additional routes to improve economies of scale, but extensions are mired in the same financial problems as new systems. Midland Metro's Birmingham-Wolverhampton route was meant to be the first part of a wider system, but no extension has been built, leaving Metro struggling for passengers because it doesn't penetrate Birmingham city centre. The expensive tram-type trains start from Snow Hill rail station in a hole below a multi-storey car park.

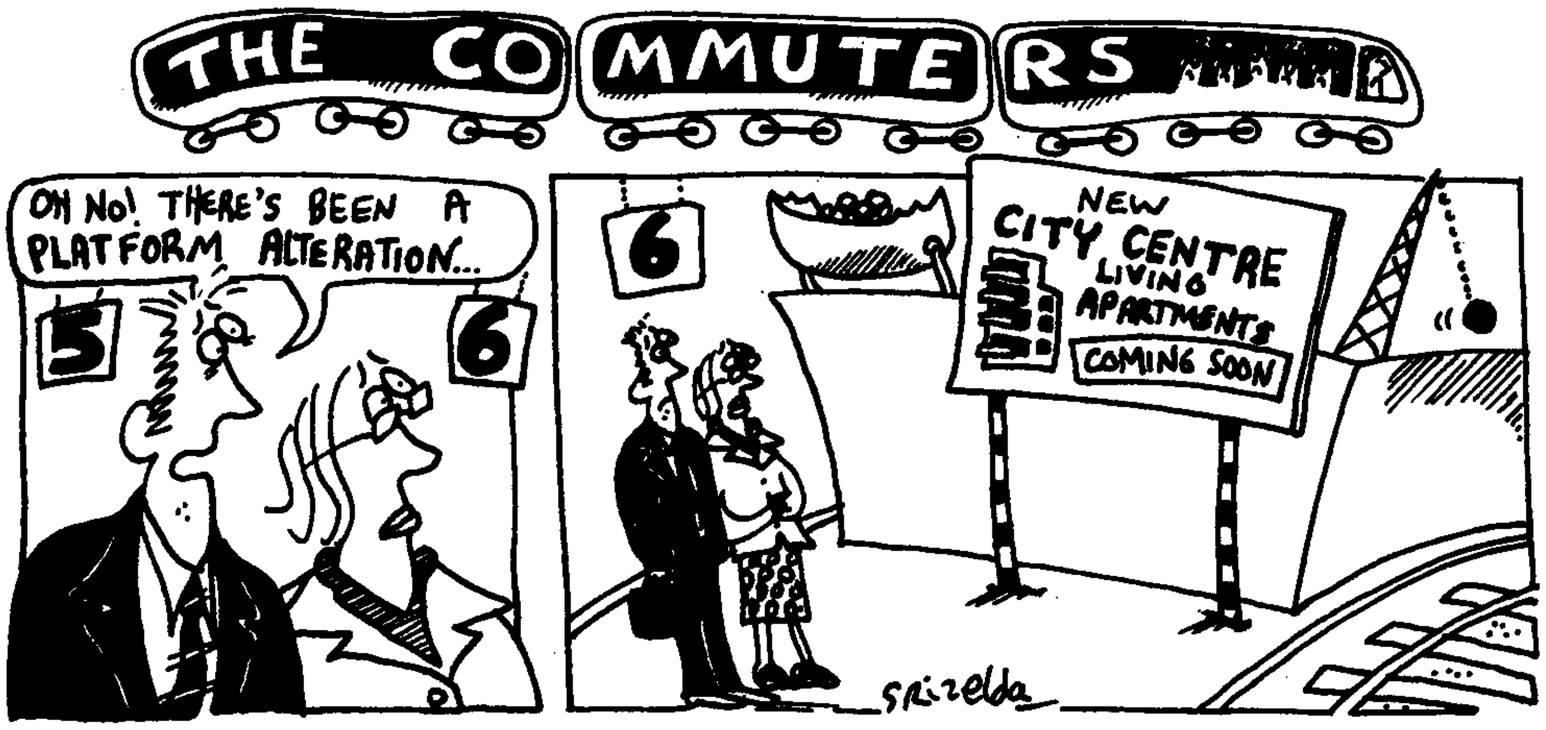
As light railways need big passenger numbers, viability partly depends on carrying people who previously went by bus. But in some cities light rail is undermined by bus firms using cheaper vehicles and offering lower fares in competition. The result is even worse city-centre congestion and a light railway that struggles to meet costs; but Labour refuses to reverse Margaret Thatcher's bus deregulation.

The private sector now realises that investing in high-quality urban transport is foolish in an environment where any bus company, no matter how rubbishy, has the statutory right to undermine serious investment (even when that investment is promoted and part-financed by public authorities). So the bidding consortia are increasing their contingency margins to absurd proportions. Bristol recently ditched its planned light railway at an advanced stage in development, and similar schemes in Leeds, Portsmouth and Edinburgh are in doubt as bidders demand huge wads too.

As if the bureaucracy of PFI weren't enough, every English scheme, including extensions to existing systems, must be approved centrally under the transport and works act. In Lyon, France, it took four years to conceive and build a new light-rail system using devolved powers; Croydon Tramlink took 14 years.

The solution should be to copy what happens in France, where even small cities like Grenoble and Strasbourg have successful light-rail systems. Local authorities would plan, build and operate the system and integrate it with buses. Private firms might be involved, separately and under tight supervision, in construction and operating contracts. Planning would be quicker and finance cheaper. But Labour would rather see cities choke on their traffic than let the public sector get a foot in the door.

'Dr B. Ching'



ROTTEN BOROUGHS

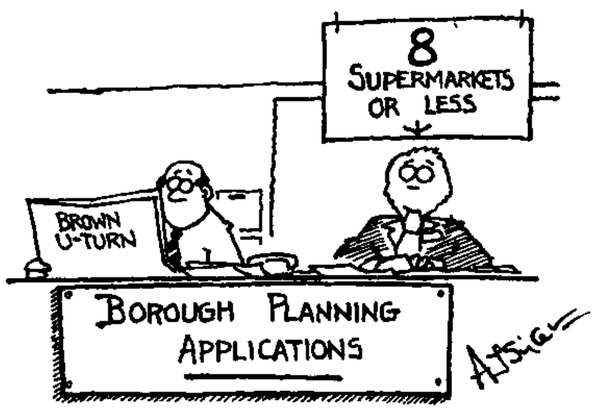
TEE EM UP

COULD the end of the road be near for Cllr Tony Ritchie (*Eyes passim*), the 24-stone former London fire chief whose alleged three-in-a-bed romps with his wife and a Thai lady friend called Tee Em so entertained *Sun* readers in 1994? (Ritchie insisted the couple's relationship with Ms Tee was "platonic".)

Following a critical report by the district auditor, Inspector Knacker is taking a close look at town planning in Southwark, where Ritchie, a former leader and mayor, has been a Labour councillor for more than 25 years. Two senior planning officers have been suspended and two Labour councillors (Ritchie and Dora Dixon-Fyle) named as not meeting "the standard expected of public servants" and not being "in a position to rebut conclusively allegations of corrupt or improper practices".

All this follows an 18-month inquiry into how planning permission was granted for a development by Fairview Homes without proper consultation and while ignoring the presence of a nearby nightclub and other irregularities. Knacker may wish to ask why the builders were prepared to pay £2.1m for the site – about six times the rate for its zoned purpose – without planning permission or a change of use permit.

The councillor for Bangkok South, sorry, Camberwell Green, has in the meantime repaired once more to Thailand. But for how much longer will meetings of Southwark council – now under Lib-Dem control – provide a marketplace for Thai watches and ties sold at advantageous rates from Ritchie's enormous suitcase?



● TRIUMPH of the weak: "Just over a year ago, we wrote to you about the Comprehensive Performance Assessment. In that letter, we explained our score and said that the council was determined upon improvement. We are now able to celebrate some achievement. At the end of last year the council was regarded [*sic*] by the Audit Commission and we have moved up to 'weak'." – Letter from Islington's Lib-Dem council leader Steve Hitchins, 18 March.

BAY WATCH

WILL the death last week of Torbay Lib-Dem councillor Ian Fenton calm the hysteria sweeping through local politics on the "English Riviera"?

A row over councillors' allowances culminated on 8 March with a rabid editorial in the local *Herald Express* newspaper signed by editor Brendan Hanrahan. He wrote of "a runaway cash gravy train... obscene payments to councillors... this financial and moral cancer... a small twisted sect... snouts firmly in the trough... orgy of money-grabbing filth..." and even "a second Bay of Pigs" (eh?) And all because councillors had voted to accept an independent pay review which recommended that their basic allowance be raised from £4,500 a year to £6,000.

This wasn't the cleverest move politically when set against a 10 percent rise in council tax and possible cuts in services; but it was hardly a new Donnygate. Hanrahan's rant inflamed Torbay's green-inkers to write to the paper in droves, largely in support of the editor's diatribe. Local Lib-Dem MP Adrian Sanders dissociated himself from the councillors and the party threatened to chuck them out.

Some calm was restored when a working party was set up to look at ways of cutting £58,000 a year from the allowances budget. The public hostility certainly rattled many councillors. Cllr Fenton wrote to the *Herald Express* on 13 March to concede that the Lib Dems had "let down" the people of Torbay. Ten days later he was found dead in his home, with no suggestion of other than natural causes. But that did not stop one councillor describing him to the *Eye* as "our own David Kelly". Steady on!

SHAM MISHTAKE?

IN THE 1990s, when Labour-controlled Enfield council gave the go-ahead for new housing on the site of the former Royal Small Arms factory, it triggered a storm of protest (*Eyes passim*).

Residents and environmentalists claimed the site had not been properly cleaned up and was contaminated after 170 years of munitions production at Enfield Lock. Local Tories became unlikely allies of the protesters and greeted a council inquiry – which found nothing wrong – with cries of "whitewash" and "sham".

But that was then. Today, as protesters predicted, there are problems on the site. Residents complain of feeling ill, flowers have mysteriously died and the council is not informing new residents of the site's history. The council has also allowed construction of a swimming pool in one back garden, which breaches the protective clay cap intended to prevent poisons coming to the surface.

Enfield council is again under siege from protesters. But where are the Tories who were so vociferous in the 1990s? Today they run the council. And, as far as they are concerned, the place is perfectly safe. "We would like to reiterate our strongly held position that residents... have a safe environment in which to live," says a council statement. So that's all right then.

PAINT JOB

IN FEBRUARY 2001 the *Eye* wrote that Bath's "millennium white elephant", the thermal Spa project, was "already nearly three years behind schedule and costing more than twice its original budget... total costs are now projected at close to £30m by completion in October 2002" (issue 1022).

That prompted angry correspondence from Bath and North-east Somerset (Banes) council's chief executive, John Everitt: "...factual errors too numerous to go into... every chance the new Spa will be a great success... not a white elephant..." etc, etc. "Rest assured," concluded Mr Everitt, "when the new Bath Spa opens in October 2002, you'll be invited to the press launch." Alas we are still waiting for Mr Everitt's stiffie, because three years on there is still no sign of the Spa opening. Latest figures suggest our original story was only inaccurate in that it was far too *optimistic* about the Spa.

Remedial work to replace faulty paintwork in the pools looks like costing up to £4.3m, an increase of £3.7m on an estimate given to councillors less than two months ago. The hideously expensive coating that will be used is an amusingly-named German epoxy-based formulation called Krautoxin – originally rejected as unsuitable. Meanwhile builder Mowlem has slapped in a claim against Banes for £7.5m in extra costs. This could push the total bill – originally estimat: £16m – to almost £40m, most of which is likely to be funded by council taxpayers.

As the *Eye* went to press Banes's director of strategy, Clive Thomas, was on sick leave amid rumours that he is about to receive a £52,000 golden goodbye to go quietly and take the blame with him.

LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELDS

WREXHAM council is about to sell off several playing fields for development after overspending by more than £10m on a botched school reorganisation.

The council had budgeted £12m to merge three secondary schools into two revamped so-called "superschools". However, after the costs rocketed to £21.5m, the council's own financial scrutiny committee discovered that the original estimate had been a "totally unrealistic ball-park figure".

With an immense financial black hole, Wrexham has been looking around for family silver to sell and has settled on some lovely areas of land. The Nine Acre Field has been a public recreation site for more than 100 years but could bring in £1.5m. Meanwhile playing fields at Plas Coch and Aston primary schools have been declared "surplus to requirements" and locals believe they too are likely to be flogged to make up the shortfall.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

THIS IS FANTASTIC, UNCLE QUIN. I'M SO EXCITED! KITE FLYING ON HAMPSTEAD HEATH!
BRILLIANT! AND IT'S REALLY WINDY!
BUT WE'RE NOT HERE TO FLY A KITE, GIDEON
WE'RE HERE TO UNFURL OUR NEW TIBETAN DEITY FLAGS

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

IT'S amazing what can be hidden by statistics, but it doesn't take a maths teacher to see through the feeble attempt of Beverley School in Surrey to make itself sound good in a job advert for an information and business technology co-ordinator.

"Beverley is a thriving foundation status secondary school located in one of the most successful LEAs in the country, which is continuing to demonstrate year on year improvement," reads the ad in the *Times Education Supplement*. "In August 2003, 65% of students predicted to achieve 5+ A*-C passes achieved this target."

Not only does this tell us absolutely nothing about the school's overall performance at GCSE, it suggests the teachers are severely over-estimating pupils' predicted grades. The actual proportion of pupils getting A*-C grades at Beverley? According to the league tables, just 34 percent.

NOOKS and CORNERS

TODDINGTON Manor in Gloucestershire is a spectacular Regency Gothic country house. Built in 1819-35, it seems to have been largely the work of its owner, Charles Hanbury-Tracey MP, who was made chairman of the committee for rebuilding the Palace of Westminster because of his accomplishment as an architect.

As William Beckford's Fonthill Abbey and the original Eaton Hall in Cheshire no longer exist, Toddington Manor is all the more important as a remarkable and early monument of the Gothic Revival and is listed grade I. Unfortunately the house was in institutional use after 1936 and has been empty since 1985. Although the building is in reasonably good condition, something needs to be done with it to secure its future. And that is where the problems begin.

Since 1989 Toddington Manor has been owned by a consortium, registered in the Virgin Islands, called Toddington Investments Ltd. This company wants to sell the house and grounds for £3.2m to Warner Holidays, which will convert it into an hotel.

Warner Holidays owns half a dozen country houses, including Bodelwyddan Castle and Thoresby Hall. But turning Toddington into an hotel seems to require conversion of the remarkable stable block with its covered ride and the building of a large residential development with car parking to the south-east of the house in the landscaped park.

This is unacceptable to the Georgian Group and SAVE Britain's Heritage. The proposed buildings – which will occupy an area equal to the original house – are to be in a sort of suburban Cotswold vernacular.

While both English Heritage and CABE, the Commission for the Built Environment, have criticised the designs, they have unfortunately accepted the principle of development. The Georgian Group, however, points out that the development of the grounds contravenes English Heritage's own guidelines on "enabling developments" published in 2001 in response to so many country houses and estates being ruined by new buildings for golf courses, health farms or whatever.

The Georgian Group points out that several other institutions and individuals have expressed interest in buying Toddington Manor and that these days there are enough rich people around willing and able to convert institutionalised country houses back into homes (like Staunton Harold). The owners, however, favour Warner Holidays because of all the design work it has done while English Heritage thinks that other possibilities cannot be considered as alternatives to the hotel development unless a full planning and listed building application is prepared – something which is unrealistic while Warner still has an option to purchase.

The really interesting question is why English Heritage's inspector seems so keen on Warner Holiday's excessive and obtrusive scheme.

TALKING of CABE, it is entertaining to note that the government has requested an independent audit into any potential "conflicts of interest" in the organisation. Writing about the nefarious proposals to build above South Kensington Station in Eyes 1094 and 1096, I noted some of the interesting connections between CABE, whose chairman is Sir Stuart Lipton, and the potential developers of the site, Stanhope plc, whose chairman, interestingly enough, is, er, Sir Stuart Lipton. Now I read that eight of CABE's 15 commissioners are clients of or somehow connected with, Stanhope. A small world, eh?

'Piloti'

AD NAUSEAM

HATS off to the Halifax. Its latest "staff as stars" spot, apart from being as woeful as any of its pisspoor predecessors, is also a flagrant crib.

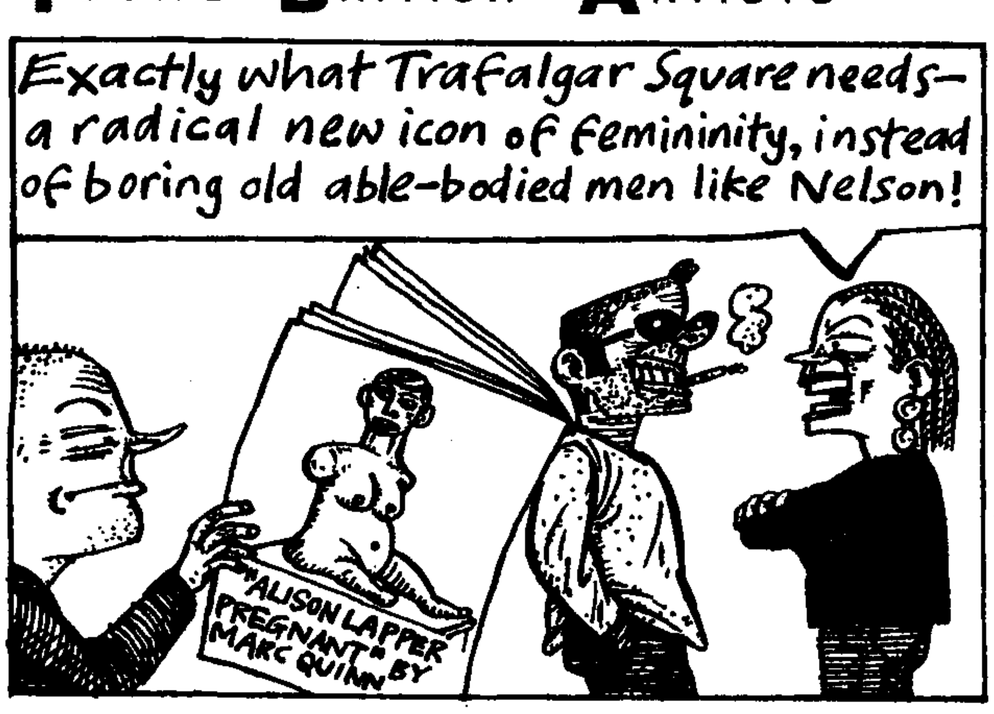
As several readers have pointed out, the spot ends with "Howard" and partner at the prow of the good ship Halifax in homage to the film *Titanic*. And we all know what happens in that story.

Moreover, the ad bears some astounding similarities to *The Crimson Permanent Assurance*, Terry Gilliam's B-movie that was screened before Monty Python's *Meaning of Life*. Both feature entire office buildings sailing away down the street, shrouded in tarpaulins which become sails; in both there is a scene where an anchor is pulled out of the pavement; and both end with the building heading towards the horizon.

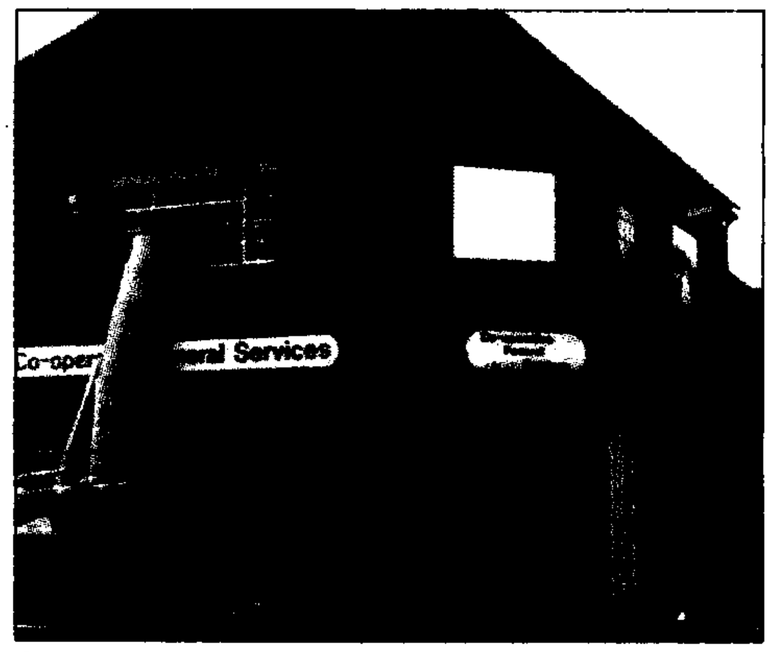
The crucial difference is the "plot". Whereas the Halifax ad depicts a happy ship of joyful workers, the original tells of a company run by evil administrators who treat their workers appallingly. This leads to a staff mutiny, the execution of the management and the whole building sailing off in to the sunset. Has ad agency DLKW merely committed a flagrant bite… or is it trying to tell us something about the Halifax? We demand to be told.

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH


Exactly what Trafalgar Square needs– a radical new icon of femininity, instead of boring old able-bodied men like Nelson!
ALISON LAPPER PREGNANT BY MARC QUINN

I-SPY *Walsall*



Submitted by Richard Lawn. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

THE BBC has made a great song and dance about its new TV mini-series on the life of Mozart – an odd collaboration between period-costume romp and idiot's guide that comes with interactive buttons to divert you from the boring bits and an uncommonly large budget.

Still, it's something to get Mozart on the box at all in these foul times when the coverage of serious music on mainstream UK television is so poor. And that explains the song and dance. The uselessness of the BBC's in-house classical music and performance department has become embarrassing – especially when the international arts TV awards come round each year and the department watches its rivals take the prizes.

Part of the problem has been a general reduction in BBC budgets. But blame also lies with the department's ineffectual and unpopular boss Peter Maniura, who has accordingly become the subject of bitter complaints from his own staff. In the past, as a mere director, he was one of the Beeb's rising stars and turned in worthwhile programmes. But as a manager of people, policy and budgets he's been hopeless – making poor programming decisions; spending way over the odds for filming rights to things like the recent *Trojans* at the Paris Chatelet (then directing it himself); and making staff feel he's too busy to accept criticism because he's got all his own projects to pursue as well.

The final straw is that he's now had to inform his disaffected colleagues that there will be no money for new projects before 2005 because of a failure of co-production funding. What this means is that he undertook the filming of high-cost frivolities like the interactive Mozart without the necessary outside finance to meet the costs. So the overspend now has to be clawed back from other projects, which are being shelved and cancelled on all sides.

Independent films have more or less ceased to be commissioned, despite the BBC's constitutional commitment to minimum 25 percent of its output from outside sources.

Meanwhile the Beeb's own staff are sitting around demoralised with nothing to do. Half the time they don't even come into the office: they stay at home "planning projects" everyone knows will never happen. They are also less than thrilled at Maniura's ability to travel in style to agreeable programme locations while everyone else has to take the cheapest option available.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

With whom would you equate him today? Musically, I don't know – perhaps John Lennon.

—Conductor Charles Hazelwood interviewed about Mozart, Radio Times, *13-19 March*

Letters

Potters barmy?

Sir,

Barry Heath (Letters, 1102) is correct. Steven Norris, soon after the crash at Potters Bar, claimed to have compelling evidence of sabotage. Strangely he has presented no such evidence to the police or the HSE. Perhaps he has been too busy! Mike Tate declares that the cause of the crash remains a mystery. Clearly he must also have been too busy to read the last HSE report (available on line at http://www.hse.gov.uk/railways/pottersbar/progreport.htm) which states: "The Board considers that the detailed evidence from the investigation to date indicates that the most likely underlying cause of the derailment was the poor condition of points 2182A at the time of the incident, and that this resulted from inappropriate adjustment and insufficient maintenance for their operating environment and safety functions, probably arising from failures of management systems" and "the points had been poorly maintained and were out of adjustment".

We now know that the points had no fewer than 83 faults largely as a result of shoddy maintenance! What mystery?

Jarvis and Railtrack have chosen to employ considerable legal muscle to fight the injured and bereaved rather than admit liability and apologise. Changing their names does not conceal the callous immorality of their position.

ROB BAWDEN,

Via email.

Mayor culpa

Sir,

Correction. Contrary to the assertion in Cole Not Dole (PE 1102), no one has sounded me out for next year's mayoral elections. I was, however, selected for the more modest role of a Labour candidate for the June council elections.

Not quite the same scoop for Rotten Boroughs.

Yours,
PHIL COLE,

Doncaster.

Dorking talking

Sir,

I am a Mole Valley councillor and I took exception to your paragraph (Rotten Boroughs, Eye 1102) about the Dorking swimming centre. Yes, there was a problem with cleanliness in 2002. This was immediately corrected.

The Dorking sports centre was about to close as it was old and out of date. Mole Valley DC has since built a new sports centre which was opened by the Duke of Gloucester not long ago and which the Queen and Prince Philip may have seen on their visit to Dorking on 21 March. If you would like to come and see it for yourself you would be more than welcome.

Please put a correction in your next column and announce the lovely new facilities that Mole Valley has provided for their residents to enjoy.

CLLR ROSEMARY DICKSON,

Leatherhead.

Lookalike

Powell

Gaddafi

Sir,

I have evidence that the recent historic meeting is nothing but a scam. I refer to the startling resemblance between Gaddafi and Robert Powell. We must be told!

Yours,
SIR EDWARD B. TEDWORTH,

Coventry.

"Darling! The WMD fairy's been"

Down on uplands

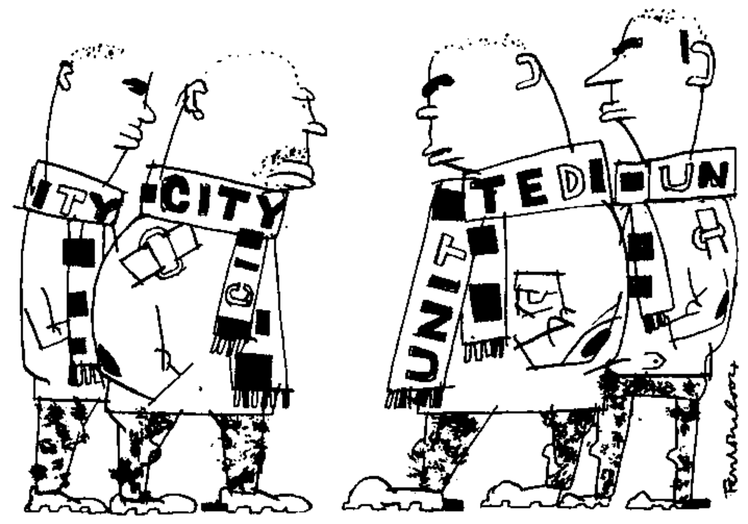
Sir,

I can't let Muckspreader's statement that without farming Britain's upland would be a "bleak and sterile" wilderness go unchallenged. A controlled grazing regime does benefit some upland birds and flowers, it is true. However, due to overgrazing, most of our uplands are currently of very little value to wildlife at all, merely being short cropped lawns covered in sheep shit. If this were to end, these areas would become such bleak and sterile habitats as... er... broad-leaved forests. Since Britain is one of the least forested countries in the world it would be hard to classify this as an environmental disaster.

Yours,
JAMES STEPHENSON,

Via email.

Scenes You Seldom See



"Oi, you lot – how about a drink after the game, and possibly a meal together?"

Ant and decked

Sir,

As Remote Controller points out (Eye 1102), it's formats that work on television – this is why it is the formats/programmes that are being cross-promoted in Saturday Night Takeaway, not the undoubted talents of Ant and Dec. This cross-promotion of ITV1 programmes is not a new phenomenon, and is certainly not restricted to ITV1 alone.

It was also unfair to criticise ITV1 over the "extra free advertising" that occurs during the "Grab the Ads" segment of the show. Broadcasting restrictions meant that this segment could only be aired if the brand names were not on show. This is why winning members of the public go home with "a car", "a pizza", "some toilet-tissue" etc.

Yours faithfully,
ROB McDONALD,

London.

Sir,

Remote Controller is dead wrong when he states that people tuned into Pop Idol and I'm a Celebrity for the shows rather than Ant and Dec. I don't know anyone who actually thinks the shows are any good, but just about everyone I know thinks Ant and Dec are the most watchable thing on TV. I and most of my friends would watch anything at all if they were in it.

Yours in embarrassment,
KIRSTEN HEY,

Edinburgh.

PS: Loved the PFI special.

Sir,

Re: TV Eye in issue 1102 concerning Ant and Dec and how to tell them apart.

The method described which is used by the producers seems a bit long-winded. I have my own, much simpler method. I can always tell them apart because Ant is the annoying, irritating one.

Yours faithfully,
PAUL ATHERTON,

Lancs.

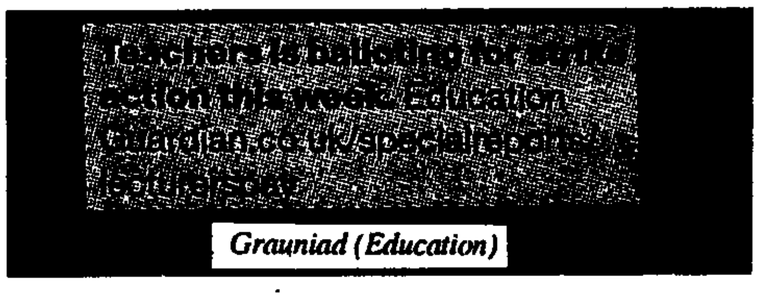
Salmon stakes

Sir,

Old Trout is spot on with his observations on the murky goings-on down on the fish farm. I am no eco-fascist: just an ordinary angler who no longer fishes on Scotland's west coast rivers as the indigenous salmonid populations are virtually extinct due to fish farms.

Yours sincerely,
MICHAEL C. SMITH,

Kinross.



Grauniad (Education)

Warballs

"What was your inspiration for your dress? Breathing. Breathing is all about tubes.

"Where do you get your ideas? From what's happening in the world around us, things that really affect us. Like the bombs on the Madrid underground [*sic*]." — *Metro* interview with Anastacia, 19-year-old London fashion student, about her backless dress.

"Far from being the dying craft of an older generation, it seems knitting has seen an enormous growth in interest in recent years. Brooke McConachy, a young American living in London, expounds her theory for the resurgence: 'I think it's a post-9/11 thing.'" — *Independent.*

Heading

Sir,

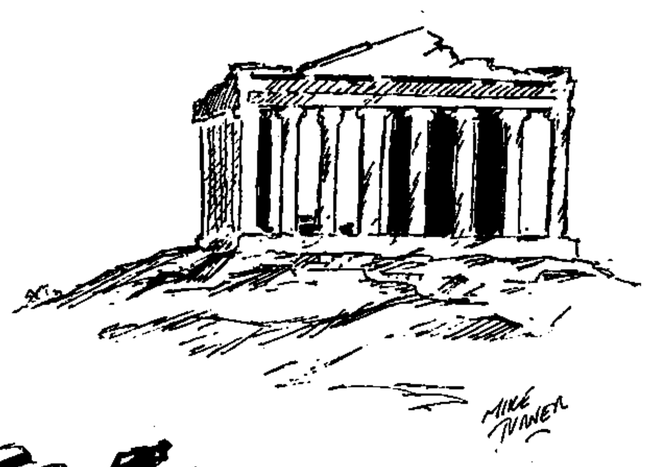
You reported the developers' side of the story of a house being built near my family home in Worcestershire. Below are two images; one is the artist's impression (1) shown to the planning committee and the other is the reality (2).

I wonder if they are by any chance related?

Wychavon District Council's planning officers strongly opposed the building on conservation grounds and recommended refusal. The planning committee only said (based on sketch plans and the artist's impression) that it was "minded" to approve it, and delegated the final decision to the Head of Planning and the local Councillor, who themselves gave approval.

The law says buildings must enhance or preserve conservation areas or the settings of listed buildings: this building actually harms both, blocks historic views (not ours) into and out of the village and is an overdevelopment of the site. The application was neither postered nor advertised. This household was not consulted and was unaware of the plan until building began. Revocation is the only legal avenue now open.

Yours,
EDWARD MCMILLAN-SCOTT MEP,
Yorkshire & Humber, Cons



"I'll bet a pound to a penny that won't be finished in time for the Olympics"

Barnet unfair

Sir,

As one of Cllr Brian Coleman's constituents I cannot allow the gross inaccuracies in his letter published in the last issue to pass unchallenged.

His prediction that the congestion charge would turn Barnet into one big car park and that this has only been prevented by the introduction of controlled parking zones is untrue. Most of the CPZs in Barnet were introduced long before the congestion charge and their benefit, if any, to Barnet residents is highly questionable even since the introduction of the congestion charge. The hike in parking charges has nothing to do with the congestion charge and everything to do with raising revenue for Barnet council.

His reference to the congestion charge being regressive appears hypocritical when compared to the increased parking charges for Barnet residents. The new charges fall most heavily on the poorest. If you are rich and live in a house with a drive or garage you do not pay the charge. If you are poor and the third car owner in a dwelling the charge, currently £20 per annum, will rise to £90pa. And if, say, you are the fourth nurse in a shared house you will have to pay £140pa for the privilege of using a car to drive to work at unsocial hours. A bit much considering it was introduced at £5pa "to cover the cost of the scheme", which is how Barnet council misled us at the time.

Yours sincerely,
RICK OSMAN,
Chipping Barnet, Herts.

Read and white

Sir,

A follow-up on Miles Kington's letter, Eye 1102. Many years ago at an exhibition in Cambridge an all-red picture was entitled "Cardinals eating tomatoes by the Red Sea" and my son, for his school exhibition, painted an all white picture entitled "The Pope feeding swans outside the White House", this picture being rejected on religious grounds.

PETER AUSTEN-BROWN,
Woodbridge, Suffolk.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"He needs to be brave now. And when I say 'brave' I mean 'brave' in the mental sense."
RON ATKINSON, ITV
(Ian Taylor)

"Wolves will be like lambs to the fodder tomorrow."
DAVE BEASANT, Radio 5 Live
(Tim Craig)

"We're at the top of a cliff and we can either fall off the edge or keep climbing."
GARY NEVILLE, ITV
(Tom Stewart)

"Gary Neville says that Porto are a bunch of girls who go down too easily."
PETER SCHMEICHEL, Radio 5 Live
(John Old)

"It is hard to keep your feet on the ground when you are flying to literally the four corners of the globe."
GORDON LORENZ, Channel 4
(Nicholas Hill)

Lookalike

Bloke

Davies

Sir,

Am I alone in noticing the striking resemblance between Mr Raymond Davies OBE, of the popular '60s beat combo The Kinks, and Mr Gary Bloke of your esteemed organ? Might you be able to shed light on whether they are in any way related?

MALCOLM EVERETT,
Via email.

TB or not TB

Sir,

Re Muckspreader (10 Feb) on the role of badgers in the exponential rise of bovine TB, and Elaine King's (predictable) response.

*Elaine King never lets other people's – or even her own – research get in the way of a dead badger, and derides with predictable arrogance Muckspreader's article, which is well supported by answers to PQs now logged in the public domain on Hansard. Population increases in badgers and their level of infectivity is all there; but more recent results from the Krebs trials are described as "being subject to secrecy, to protect the integrity of the trial". With a robust strategy on both cattle **and** badgers up until 1988 bTB was almost eradicated from both populations. Hansard quotes just 782 cattle slaughtered in 1988. But after pressure from Elaine and her followers, all previous research was sanitised and future strategies weakened as successive professors.*

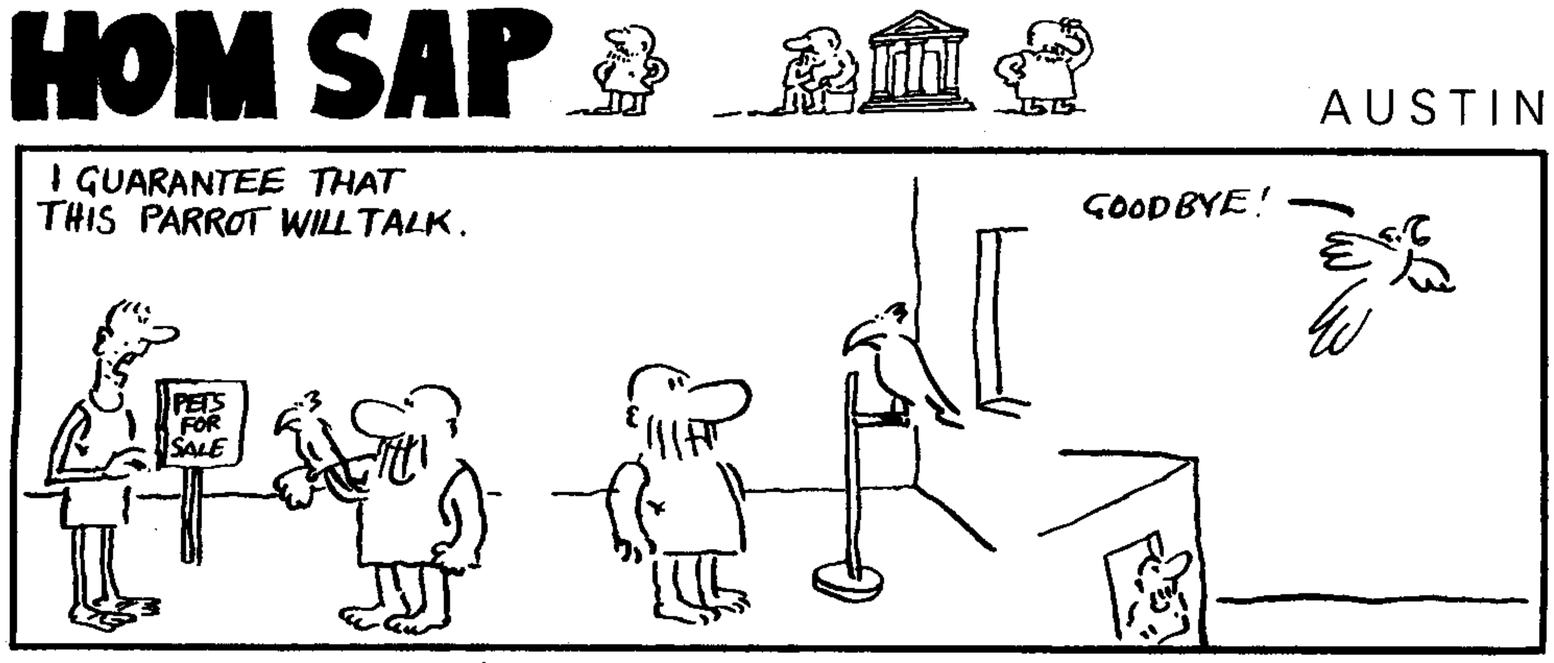
The latest, John Bourne of the ISG, she quotes as suggesting that if we "control" bTB in cattle, "the disease will die out in wildlife". Really? What an amazing bacteria!

A grade B1 pathogen, arguably the most infectious bug on the planet, which infects not only badgers but deer, small mammals, cattle, camelids and human beings too, and which is known and accepted to be endemic in the badger. But it will die out in the badgers, without spilling over into secondary populations if we kill all the cattle, or nail their feet to the floor with movement restrictions (just like FMD?) And all this without Defra doing anything – other than employing Bourne and his cohorts for a few more years?

Cattle, regularly tested, are only a sentinel of the amount of TB bacterium in the environment. Our home-bred, bio-secure herd didn't get bTB from the man in the moon. And I don't like seeing half dead badgers wandering our land, weak and scarred from fighting and dripping puss-laden abscesses and infected urine over my grassland. They have infected my cattle and put other wildlife, myself, my visitors and grandchildren at risk, until a lingering starvation and finally death puts them out of their misery.

*I don't want to eradicate badgers – I **do** want to eradicate TB.*

Yours faithfully,
A. FARMER,
(Name and address withheld)



What you term as 'cottaging' has been an important part of country life since time immemorial. I would put a wager on that the 50 archers sent from Reading to Agincourt were mostly happy cottagers.

Letter to Reading Evening Post

Letter from **South Africa**
from Our Own Correspondent

WE ALREADY know the result of our April election (stonking win for the African National Congress, triumphal re-coronation of President Thabo Mbeki). So the hustings are only enlivened by the sight of cynical politicians of all parties jockeying for tasty sinecures and cheap publicity.

In April we also celebrate ten years of democracy, and already our parliamentary politics resemble a self-serving carousel. The ANC is so secure it has spent most of the past year publicly trashing its two official government partners, the Trades Union Congress (COSATU) and the Communist Party (SACP), and has even entered into a pact with its former nemesis and the creator of apartheid, the "New" National Party (NNP).

In the last election the NNP was in the Democratic Alliance (DA), a kind of last-stand white party. But when it fell out the ANC grotesquely threw a lifeline to the dwindling remnants of white supremacy. In retaliation the DA is now teaming up with wily old Chief Buthelezi – even though the touchy Zulu kingpin is still in cabinet as minister of home affairs.

The real master at bestriding opposites, however, is our own enigmatic, pipe-smoking president. When big business warmly welcomed the election budget, Mbeki explained in his weekly ANC website letter that it represented "financial interventions of the democratic state to give effect to the dialectically interconnected process of revolution and reform".

Mbeki gets away with such tosh for two reasons. First, only 6 percent of the country is on the internet, so those who are starving aren't subjected to his sham Marxist posturing. The other reason is that the bungling official opposition is led by an arrogant white man. (On posters across the country, the DA put its campaign slogan – "South Africa deserves better" – above a picture of its own dear leader, Tony Leon.)

What little opposition there is comes from within government itself. Mbeki (an ex-Central Committee member) has mostly neutralized this threat, however, by appointing Communist party leaders to his cabinet and putting them in charge of things like privatisation and trade and industry. Recently the SACP, in its internal report *Towards a Ten Year Review*, said South Africa could not defeat poverty within a capitalist system. But when a newspaper revealed this unsurprising analysis, the comrades decried the leak and denied they'd ever said capitalism wasn't the heroic way forward.

Mbeki has also dealt ruthlessly with opponents within the ANC and his unchallenged supremacy has allowed him to revert to his old habits over HIV/Aids (which he still only refers to as "this thing"). Some believe that after the election, armed with a large majority, he will revert to open Aids denial.

In this he is followed slavishly by the much derided health minister, the useless Manto Tshabala-Msimang. Stalling at every point in providing anti-retrovirals, Manto's best effort so far has been to recommend to Aids sufferers a diet of garlic, beetroot, African potato, a splash of lemon and a drizzle of olive oil. The recipe may be all the rage in trendy London restaurants but it's not on the menu in poor African townships.

Meanwhile the ANC seems to have learnt several cynical "presentational" tricks from Westminster. It has even benefited in the past from visits by "new" Labour luminaries like Peter Mandelson, who have tutored Mbeki's ministers in the dark arts. Thus the ANC has now managed to wipe legions from the unemployment figures.

How so? Anyone working one hour a week (say on their vegetable garden) was previously recorded as "economically inactive". But now they are logged as employed. This art of opposites means that one can be "employed" as far as the government is concerned yet earn absolutely nothing. Mind you, if the poor are cultivating a vegetable patch, they can always turn to beetroot, garlic, African potatoes and lemons…

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

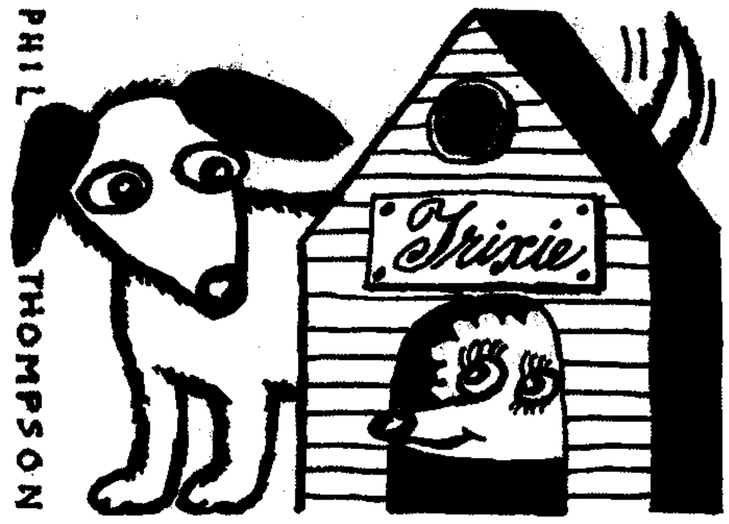
● "I am very very sorry for what happened, because my aunt was a nice person who often cooked meals for me," Nobuhiko Takahashi told police when they came to arrest him in the Japanese village of Hirata, Fukushima. "In fact, she was a saint, but our family undertaking business was strapped for cash, and the bank was threatening to close us down, so action was needed. I thought that if I killed Auntie Chiyoko, who was a very wealthy woman, then my company would be asked to conduct a lavish funeral for her, and we would be saved from ruin. So I broke into her house and beat her to death with a golf club and a lavatory brush, but I only did it to protect the honour of my family. I thought that the suicide note I faked would convince everyone, but I see now that I made a basic mistake by signing my own name at the end of it".

Later, a police spokesman explained that they had initially treated the death of Chiyoko Shiga, 77, as suicide. "But in January, our suspicions turned to the Takahashi funeral parlour, when we discovered that it was on the verge of bankruptcy. Funerals in Japan are always very expensive, usually well in excess of US$20,000. Mrs Shiga's one was likely to cost far more than that, and Nobuhiko Takahashi has admitted to us that he simply could not resist the temptation. But sadly for him, her next-of-kin chose a rival undertaker to conduct the funeral, so his business went bust anyway. And then somebody checked the suicide note again..." *(Weekend Australian, 11/2/04, and South China Morning Post, 12/2/04. Spotter: Arnold Auch)*

– ● –

● *"Most dogs in this city only get a five-minute walk on a lead each day, and that's not long enough even to sniff another canine, let alone indulge in a bit of fun," Karl-Friedrich Lentze told reporters in Berlin. "A dog brothel will allow them to release their frustrations, and will suit the fast-paced modern lifestyle of their owners too. For £20, a dog owner will be able to leave their pet at my brothel for an afternoon, so it can have sex with one of our bitches on heat, while they go shopping. And of course we'll be happy to receive female, gay, and disabled dogs too. It's a democratic thing."*

But Berlin city officials rejected the planning application, claiming that "dog sex should be for the purpose of reproduction only, and there is no evidence of a problem with sexual frustration among the city's dog population. When dogs rub themselves on people's legs, it is just a result of boredom and an attempt to show who's boss. A visit to a brothel would only reinforce a dog's



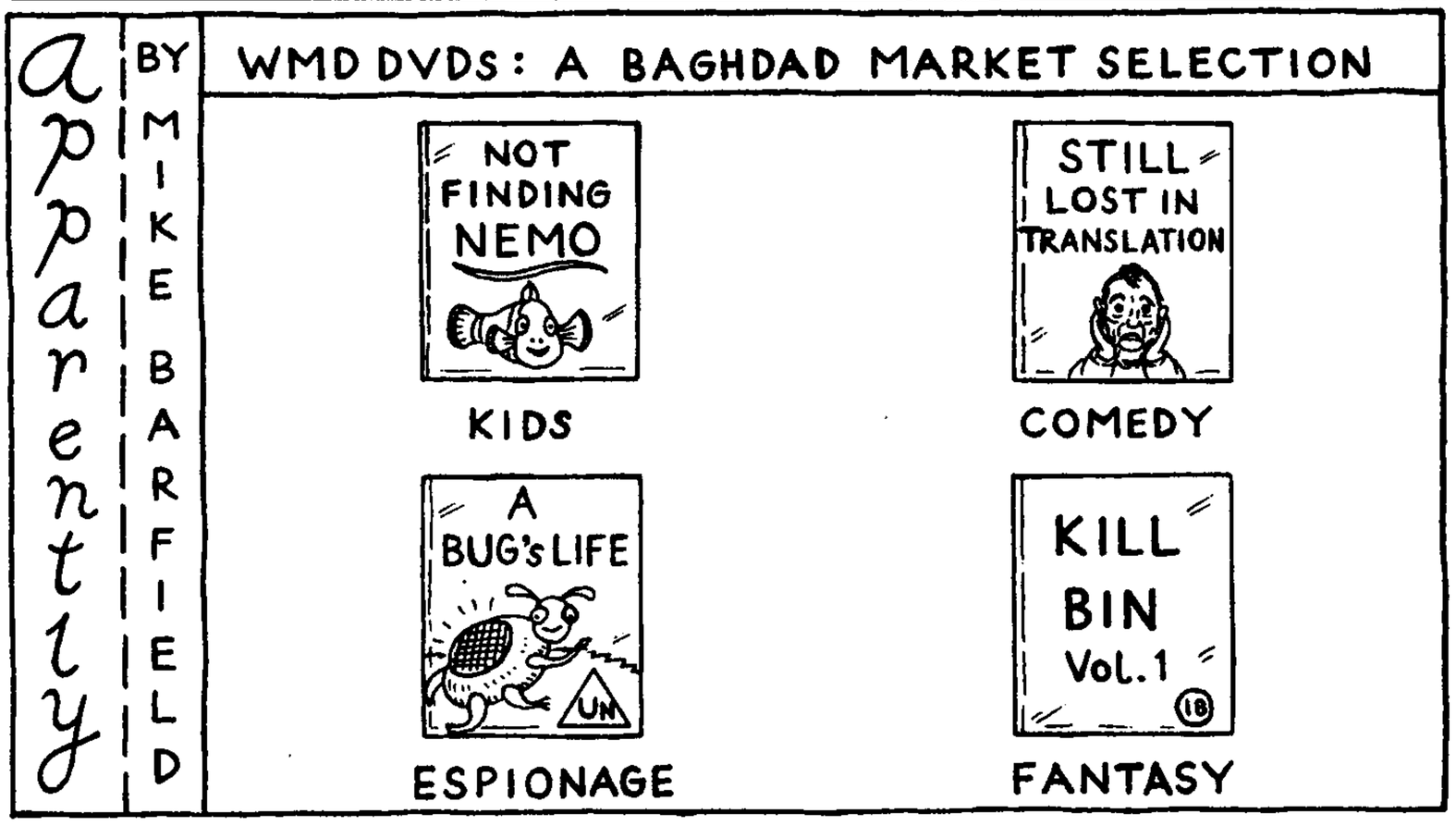
sense of self-importance, and make him more troublesome, not less." (Queensland Sports Truth, 4/6/03. Spotter: Norm Reynolds)

– ● –

● "I bought the parrot eight months ago," Li Yong told a reporter from the Zhengzhou Evening News in Henan province, "having been told by the petshop owner that it would be a good talker. At first, I tried to teach it by whispering simple greetings to it, such as 'hello' and 'goodbye', but all my attempts failed, and after a few months I lost patience. In frustration, I started shouting insults at it, like 'fucking idiot' and 'stupid moron' at it, and it picked those up immediately, and began shouting them back at me.

"Things got steadily worse, because the more I insulted it, the more words it learned, and the more it kept shouting them back at me. Until one morning, when it repeatedly called me a 'dumb motherfucker', and a 'fat cretinous bastard', and I regret to say that I lost all patience and strangled it on its perch. No, since you ask, I don't feel good about what I've done. But action was necessary, because I am a Christian and I cannot abide filthy language in my house, least of all from a parrot. And I could hardly have given a bird like that to anyone else, could I?"

Officials in Henan province confirmed that no action would be taken against Li Yong. *(China Daily, 2/2/04. Spotter: Brian Thomas)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Buenos días!

As I said to my new Spanish friend Brother Zapatero, when I had the pleasure of meeting him in Madrid last week!

Although we had never met before, and although he had accused me of being a liar, I am glad to say that we got on extremely well!

Indeed, he is now my closest friend, even though we disagree on a whole range of issues, such as whether or not I am a liar!

However, I managed to persuade him to stand firm on his view that I am incapable of telling the truth, and I am sure you will agree that that made a very good start to our new friendship!

Unfortunately, I did not have any more time to spend with Fra Zapatero because I then had to "move on" to Libya. This is where I continued my inter-faith mission by meeting the spiritual leader of six million Libyans, Mahatma Gandaffhi.

I know a number of people in the parish have been unhappy about this, just as they were unhappy about our support for the Rev. Dubya's great crusade against the Evil One!

But to all those doubting Thomases (and Clares and Robins and all the others whose Christian names I have not got room to list here!) I say, "If we had not gone forth on our great campaign for world peace, would the Mahatma now be prepared to sit down with me in his tent, and offer me a dish of dried camel dung (which I am told is the greatest tribute any Arab host can pay to an honoured guest!)?"

And now, thanks to the success of our peace mission in Iraq, the great Mahatma has agreed to forswear the use of violence forever!

Truly he is a sinner who repenteth! And does not the Good Book tell us that, "There is more joy in heaven over the sinner who is prepared to sell us oil than there is over the ninety-nine virtuous men who have nothing to offer"? *(Book of Exxonus, 15.6)*

Adios amigos!

Antonio

To Remember In Your Prayers

● The Rev. Kennedy, minister of the United Reform Liberal Democrat church, who, as you all know, is extremely ill. We have all been very shocked by Mr Kennedy's recent appearance and blurred speech, and we pray that he will find the strength to understand the real reasons for his illness. We pray that he will come to terms with his drink problem and realise that he is only resorting to alcohol because he is incapable of doing his job properly. Let's face it, leading a congregation is a very tough and demanding job, even if you aren't ill, which I am not, whatever Carole Caplin and the Queen may say! So please don't waste your time praying for me since I am 100 percent fit! So, we should all remember to pray for the Rev. Kennedy's early retirement, particularly when we recall his embarrassing efforts in recent months to criticise your vicar and our good friend the Rev Dubya for attempting to rid the world of evil. Now that we understand that Mr Kennedy only said these things because he was suffering from delirium tremens, hallucinations and all the other symptoms of what the doctors now know as "Mowlam's Syndrome By Proxy", we should all feel the appropriate degree of compassion, and hope that he has the good sense to retire before he dies! T.B.

Planning Notice:

St Albion's District Council

A planning application has been submitted for the building of a 30-metre high concrete wall by the Sharon Construction Co (Tel Aviv) to surround the St Albion's vicarage and adjacent buildings. The purpose of this scheme is to protect the vicar and members of the PCC from the terrorist outrages which we are assured by Mr Blunkett of the Neighbourhood Watch are shortly to take place. Any objections must be registered with the Council by February 12 last year.

J. Prescott,
Chairman of the Planning Committee

Salve

A very warm welcome to Mr Howell James, who is going to be advising the Vicar over his relations with the "media". Mr James is of course an old friend of the parish, being a former "partner" of the current "partner" of our former churchwarden Mr Mandelson! What a small world it is, and what an amazing coincidence it is that I should have given him a job! I also gather that Mr James is a good friend of my friend Mr Birt, who is in charge of the PCC's "Blue Sky Thinking" department. What an even smaller world that makes it! T.B.

Advertisement

JOBS FOR THE BOYFRIENDS!!!

The Handy Mandy Executive Appointments Agency *(prop. P. Mandelson)* specialises in finding suitable positions for high-flying male executives.

Discretion guaranteed!

Parish Postbag

Dear Sir,

I would like to apologise for my very unfortunate and unforgiveable slip of the tongue when I inadverently referred to our treasurer Mr Brown as "the Vicar". I have no idea what came over me, since in recent months we have increasingly come to realise that there is only one man capable of giving this parish the leadership it needs and that is the Vicar, Mr Brown.

Yours faithfully,
Mrs Harman,
Two Sisters Road.

MR CAMPBELL'S ONE MAN SHOW

Alastair demonstrates how to present the truth in a straightforward and honest way!! Tickets still available!!!! P.M.

THE Sun SAYS

WHAT'S wrong with your job, Sven, you Swedish traitor? It's the greatest honour there is to be followed around by a group of Sun reporters night and day.

So what's your problem? Look, you've got the best job in the world. Managing the best team in the world. Okay, we haven't won anything, but whose fault is that? Yours. So why don't you clear off and take your Sun reporters with you? *(I'm not sure this is quite right. Ed.)*

On Other Pages

Picture of Sven with woman *(possibly mystery blonde)* **3**

Picture of Sven with man *(possibly owner of football club)* **4**

Picture of bald man with glasses on toilet *(possibly Sven)* **5**

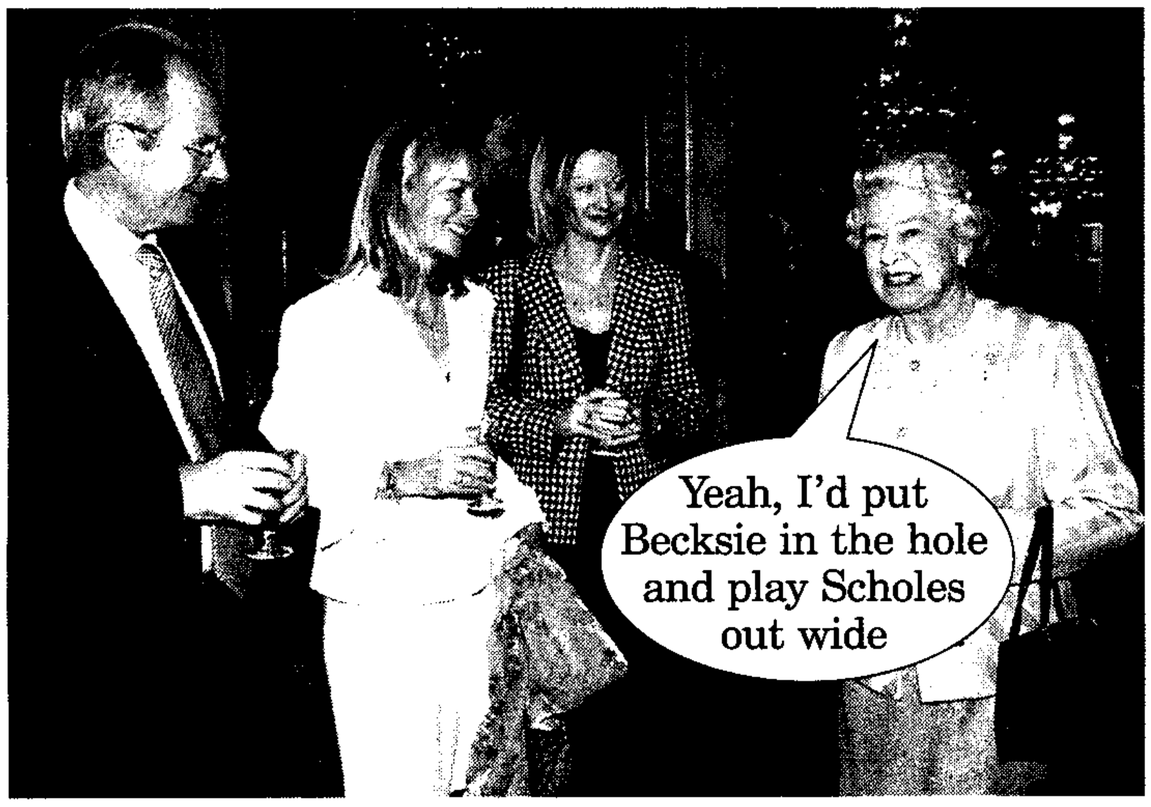
Unfunny Sven cartoon **94**

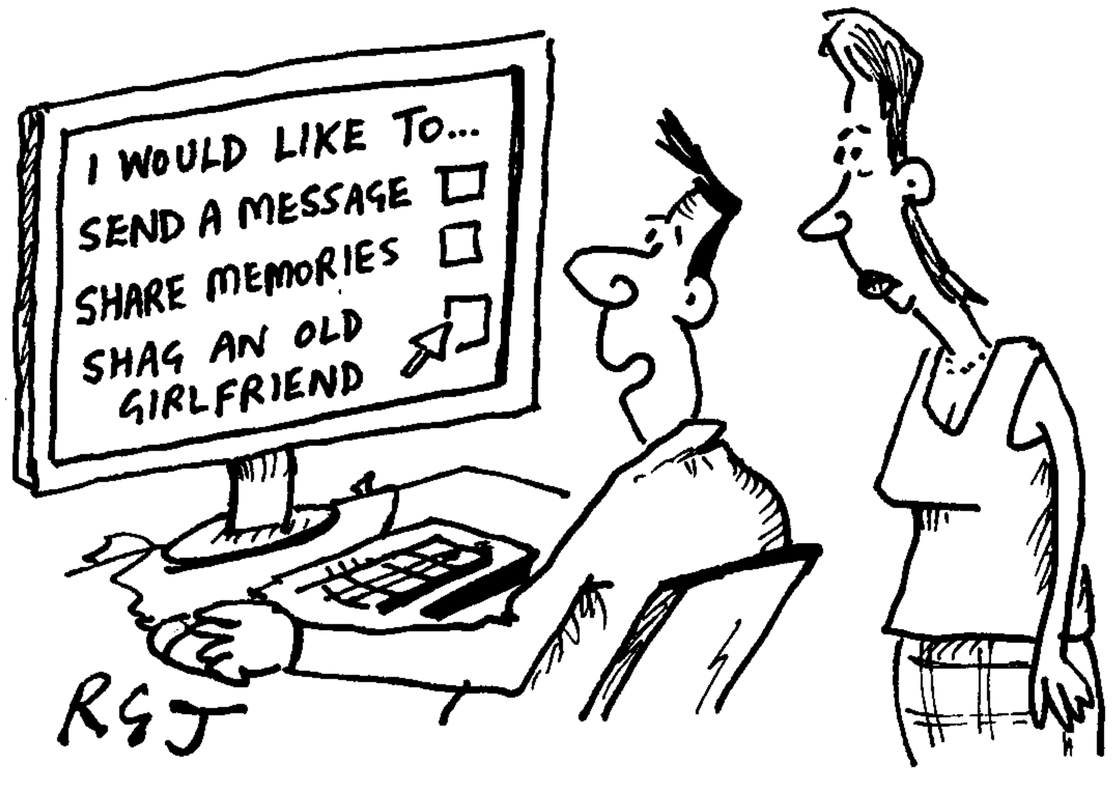
SUN COMPETITION

SPOT THE SVEN

Have you seen Sven anywhere, getting up to no good? If you have, please let us know. It doesn't matter if he is doing his shopping or filling his car with petrol. We want to know, so we can tell him what a disgrace he is – to be going shopping or filling his car with petrol when he should be steering England to victory in Portugal 2004.

NEW-LOOK QUEEN Pt 94





"They've really made 'Friends Reunited' easy to use"

CHARDONNAY TO HIT BACK AT ARCHBISHOP

by Our Footballers Wives' Correspondent **Rowan Pele**

IN AN Easter message from the grave, the late Chardonnay will lash out at Bishops' wives whom she will say are "lowering the moral tone of the whole country".

She cites in particular the recent episode where a Bishop admitted that his wife was a man although they were no longer having sex.

"What kind of example does that set," she said, "in a world that is looking for *(cont. p. 94)*

AN APOLOGY
The England Rugby Team

WE, IN COMMON with all other newspapers, may have inadvertently given the impression that the England Rugby Team were a world-beating squad of heroes.

We now realise that they are a useless rabble of overweight mediocrities who cannot even beat the French.

We apologise for any confusion to which our reports may have given rise.

© All newspapers

GLENDA SLAGG

FLEET STREET'S QUEEN OF THE QUILL!

■ **HATS OFF to Des O'Connor, the 72-year-old Dad-to-be!!?! OK, so he's old enough to be his own great-grandfather – but so what?!? You don't have to be a teenager to change nappies and wheel the pram round the park, do ya?!?! Come off it, Mr Newsman – you're just jealous 'cos Dishy Des has got a leggy lovely up the duff!?!? Good on yer, Des!?!?!**

■ GOO-GOO ga-ga!?!? And that's just what Dirty Des O'Connor will be saying when he's a-droolin' and a-dribblin' and his poor little 'un has to help him go to the toilet and wheel him round the park in his bathchair!!?!?! What a Des-grace!?!? (Geddit?!?) At your age you should be in the garden putting in a few bulbs and not upstairs putting your you-know-what into you-know-where!!?!? Clear off, Des!?!? I said "Clear off, Des" – or haven't you got your hearing aid turned on!?!?!

■ **BLIMEY!?! Have you seen Anne Robinson?!?! One minute she looks like Barbara Cartland, the next she looks like Barbie Doll!?!? Give us the name of your plastic surgeon, luv, and I'll make a point of avoiding him!!?! You are the *weirdest* link! Goodbye!!?!**

■ ANNE ROBINSON – doesn't she look a million dollars?!?!? Or at least that's what she must have paid Dr Strangeface to get her ears put up by her knees – or whatever she's had done!?!?! Believe me, darlin', you don't look bad for a 60-year-old – you look awful!?!?!! Goodbye!?!?!!

■ *WHICH 60-year-old wouldn't die to have the little girl looks of the Princess of the Putdown!?!?!? I mean sexy Anne Robinson, stoopid!?!?! Perhaps she and Des O'Connor should get together and start a family!?!?!!? His **link** is anything but weak!?!?!! Ged-dit!?!?!*

■ HERE THEY ARE – Glenda's Easter Hunnies!?!?! (Geddit?!?)

● **TV's Simon Kelner** – Here's an Independent gal who wants the big one, not the compact version!?!! Geddit?!?!

● **Sir Menzies Campbell** – They call you Ming, I'll call you anytime?!?! Mmmm-ing!!?!?!

● **Alastair Ross** – the Mucky Major!!?! At last a Hussar who isn't Gay!?!?! How about some under-cover manoeuvres round at my place?!?!?!

Byeeeee!!!

THE BOOK OF SHARON

Chapter 94

1. And lo, there was dwelling in the land of Gaza a holy man of the Hamas-ites, whose name was Yas-sin, which is to say the man of death.
2. And Yas-sin was old and full of years, and his beard was extremely white, like unto the snow on Mount Arafat.
3. And Yas-sin was sore afflicted, so that he could not walk, but needeth many followers to carry him hither and thither on a small chariot which is called an "wheelchair".
4. And despite these afflictions, Yas-sin plotted darkly in his heart against the children of Israel, conspiring how he might smite them.
5. But Yas-sin had one problem.
6. For the children of Israel had many tanks and guns and many rockets, even unto the device that is nuclear.
7. For thus had revealed the prophet Vanunu in the *Times that is Sunday*, for which he had been locked up by the children of Israel.
8. But that is another story.
9. Thus when it came to the smiting, it was a bit one-sided.
10. So Yas-sin spake unto the sons and daughters of the Araf-ites, saying unto them "Go forth into the land of Israel and slay all the men, women and children of that land, and yourselves also.
11. "For it hath been revealed to me that whosoever doeth this shall be taken straightway into Paradise, where many virgins will be waiting, even a-gagging for it.
12. "This doth not of course apply to the daughters of Ham-as, but you can't have everything."
13. And they did as they were bidden, and so it came to pass, even as Yas-sin had foretold, save for the Paradise bit.
14. And when Sharon saw what the sons and daughters of the Hamas-ites had done, he waxed wroth.
15. Boy, did he wax wroth.
16. Then said Sharon, "Woe unto the Hamas-ites, for have I not smitten them again and again, like unto the hammer that falleth repeatedly upon the anvil?
17. "Have I not laid waste their dwellings with the great Bull of Dozer?
18. "And have I not built a mighty wall round the land of Israel (not to mention a few bits of Palestine as well) that is 50 cubits high and 50 cubits wide and 10,000 cubits long.
19. "And still they learneth not the lesson. They come like a wolf in the night, to devour our lambs in the fold.
20. "For it is many years that I have smitten the Hamas-ites, the Araf-ites, the Hezboll-ites and all the other -ites in vain."
21. "So the time hath come to try an new approach – I shall smite them even harder."
22. And so Sharon rose early and girdeth up his loins and did send his ships that are called "gun" (a gift from the Land of Dubya).
23. And thus did the children of Israel seek out Yas-sin, even as he was at his prayers, giving thanks for the number of Israelites that had been slain.
24. And they slew him, along with any men, women and children who happened to be standing nearby. And when he saw this Sharon rejoiced and the heart of Sharon exulteth at this slaughter.
25. "This will teach the Hamas-ites a lesson they will never forget," he saith.
26. And, lo, the sons of the Arab-ites rose up in their thousands, even their tens of thousands, and crieth aloud, "Woe unto Sharon and the children of Israel. We will teach them a lesson such as they will never forget."
27. Then they went forth to seek out the children of Israel, that they might slay them.
28. And thus yet again did Sharon return in his wisdom to the square that is called one. *(Continued to the end of time or the Day of Judgement, which ever shall be the sooner.)*

NEW DEAL FOR MIDDLE EAST

Washington Exchange And Mart

FOR SALE

One Middle-East Road Map To Peace

Still in original wrapping paper.
Excellent condition, as never been used.
Quick sale due to unexpected death of elderly Palestinian gentleman.
Time-wasters only.
Contact George or Colin @ The White House.

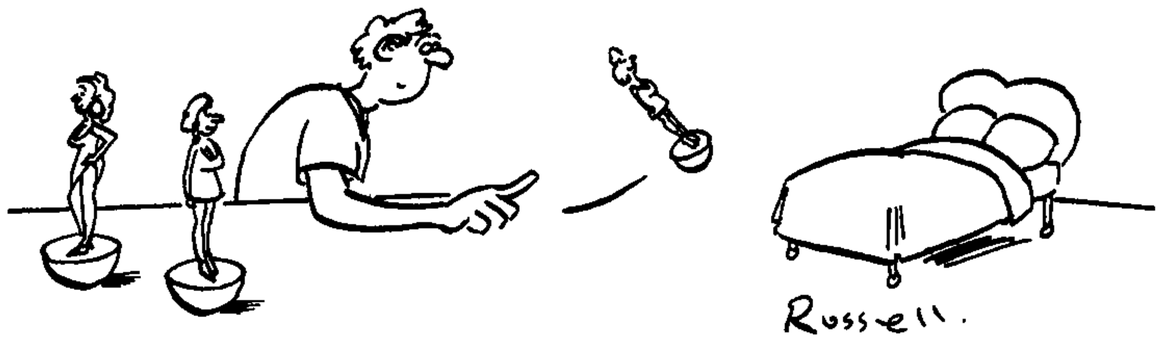


Table Footballers' Wives

Eat Col. Gaddafi's Kentucky Fried Chicken Or You Will Be Shot

Daily Tripoligraph

2 Barrels of Oil

GADDAFI SALUTES 'BRAVE' BLAIR

by Our Man In Tripoli **Libya Purves**

COL GADDAFI has taken a bold political gamble by agreeing to meet the notorious Western war criminal Tony Blair.

Said Gaddafi last night, "I know in the past Blair has become something of a pariah among the civilised nations. Many have refused to deal with him after his acts of terrorism in Iraq and the thousands of deaths which have resulted from his crazed lust for power.

"But it is my belief now," the Libyan spiritual leader and world statesman continued, "that it is time to bring Blair in from the cold, and to draw a line under his unfortunate international record."

Gaddafi Duck

But some Libyan peace groups were furious at their government's attempt to rehabilitate Tony Blair so soon after his Iraq aggression.

"Blair is a dangerous lunatic who believes that he is infallible," said spokesman Tony Benn-Ghazi. "He is totally unpredictable and should not be trusted to buy our oil and give us a huge amount of money."

On Other Pages

★ *This week's public hangings: where to see them* **14** ★ *Was Blair responsible for Lockerbie crash?* **8** ★ *Tent prices tumble – is this the end for civilisation?* **10** ★ *Your camel trains tonight* **24**

Advertisement

FOR SALE

Nuclear centrifuges, unused, some still in packaging, bearing label *"A gift from the West to enable you to give them up again"*

BECKS MEETS MADRID BOMBER

– Was He Inches From Death? p.1

On Other Pages

What Was Posh Wearing As Becks Cheated Death? 2-10

Should 100' Concrete Wall Be Built Round Beckham? 11

Millions Mourn Madrid's 200 Dead – see News In Brief 94

The Guardian Friday April 2 2004

Marina Snyde

Jeremy Clarkson, having hit Mirror Editor Piers Morgan three times in the face at the British Press Awards, keeps making references to Piers Morgan's "complicated personal life". What could be so complicated about it then? The diary would normally ring up everyone involved to find out and perhaps make fun of their secretaries to fill up some space. But not this time. Coincidence, eh?

I did, however, as a professional journalist, contact myself and offer me the chance to put my side of the story. Very kind. And did I want to comment about my relationship with Piers? Strangely not. Did I agree with Clarkson that it was hypocritical of Piers to keep suggesting Clarkson was having an extra marital affair – when Piers actually *was* having one and had left his wife and children for a fellow journalist? Not a word. And what is the "complicated situation" now? Deadly silence. Guardian readers are obviously not interested in this sort of thing. Unless it's about someone else of course. Very pot and kettle, I must say

(continued for years)

DRUGS TO BE AVAILABLE 24 HOURS A DAY

by Lunch, Dinner and Breakfast-time O'Booze

THE Government has launched a new scheme to crack down on drug addiction by making narcotics available round the clock to anyone who wants them.

Looney Binge

"It is the obvious logical approach," said the Health Minister. "At the moment there are too many restrictions on when and where you can take drugs.

"If we encourage people to take drugs day and night, 24/7, then surely the result will be an end to drug-related problems?"

HOWARD 'TOO YOUNG' SAYS HEATH

THE FORMER Prime Minister, Sir Edward Heath, has attacked the Tory leader Michael Howard for being "too young".

Said Heath, "The modern Tory Party needs to be led by someone untainted by the Thatcher years, someone much older, perhaps with an agreeable house in Salisbury, a number of rich Chinese friends and an interest in music and sailing".

Grocer Heath is 94.

THE FACE APRIL 2004

What's in

Yaks'-hair raincoats worn over three-quarter length banana-skin pantaloons.

'Suicide' chic.

The letter I and E but not before C.

What's out

The Face Magazine

"Will you be my excuse for not fulfilling all my ambitions?"

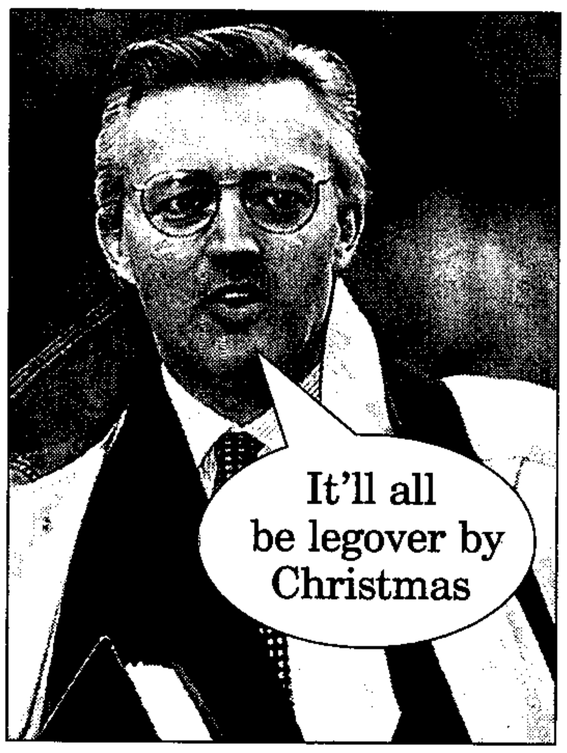
RIÊU CÁ CHÉP

Crap in hot-pot

Crape dans la fondue

Bo Tung Xed restaurant, Ho Chi Minh City

WAR PICTURE LIBRARY
MAJOR EMBARRASSMENT



BUSH 'SLOW TO REACT' SHOCK CLAIM

by Our Man In Washington **Al Qaeda**

THE OFFICIAL commission into the terrorist attacks upon the United States has accused President Bush of being "slow to react" to the imminent threat.

"He did not see the trouble coming, was uninformed on the subject and prevaricated over a suitable response," said the report.

Said a spokesman for President Bush, "Hell... we didn't expect this... I don't know what to say... the President will probably do something about it next week."

MANDY TO GET BRUSSELS JOB

by Our European Staff **Lunchtime O'Laf**

MR PETER MANDELSON has been hotly tipped to become the all-powerful European Commissioner in charge of fraud and corruption.

The areas the former Cabinet minister is expected to investigate include obtaining mortgages by deception, the receipt of interest-free loans from businessmen, and the use of backstairs influence to obtain fast-track passports for Asian tycoons.

"Signor Mandelson is perfect for the job," said the EU's former Italian President Silvio Berlusconmani *(cont'd. p. 94)*

DES O'CONNOR TO HAVE NEW JOKE

by Our Showbiz Staff Lunchtime **O.A.P.**

DES O'CONNOR, the 72-year-old entertainer, has astonished friends by revealing that he is going to have a new joke.

O'Connor already has three jokes, aged 53, 42 and 38, and most showbiz experts thought that he was too old to have another.

Some claimed it was undignified for a man of 72 to try for another joke. Said one, "There's a real chance that Des will die on stage. And what will happen to the joke then?

"Will it end up being taken care of by Little and Large? It doesn't bear thinking about."

But a delighted O'Connor was unapologetic and declared, "This shows that even at my age I've still got lead in my pencil – and I've used it to write a new joke."

SUNDAY TIMES INSIGHT TEAM

WHAT'S WRONG WITH 94-YEAR-OLD MRS THATCHER?

by Leslie Spite

The Sunday Times Insight Team can reveal exclusively that just 40 years ago Mrs Thatcher was a middle-aged woman who looked much younger than she does now.

What on earth then is the matter with her? OK, she has been ill and has got older – but why does she look so old and ill? Anyone would think she was 94.

And another thing – her memory isn't as good as it was when she was 20!

Nor is she as happy as she was when her husband was alive! Amazing but true!

So what *is* behind the tragic

Picture by Snowgood

decline of the Sunday Times, which used to run important stories rather than feeble pieces stating the bleeding obvious?

"We are what we eat, Brian"

Nature Notes

Tit Spotted In West London Garden

A blue tit writes: At least five blue tits have reported seeing the well-known celebrity and radio personality John Humphrys peering at them out of his kitchen window so that he could boast about seeing them on the Today programme. "He looked a right tit," said one, "or possibly a nutterhatch, a tree creep or *(That's enough rotten bird puns. Ed.)*

THE INSPECTOR MORSE MYSTERIES

No. 94

THE CASE OF THE DEAD PRINCESS

(Red Jaguar is seen driving through leafy lanes of Gloucestershire. Cut to interior of vehicle)

Sergeant Lewis *(speaking over tape of The Marriage of Figaro)*: What I don't understand, sir, is why we're having to dig all this up again. We know it was just an accident...

Inspector Morse: Lew-is, Lew-is. Don't you learn anything? We're going to interview the Prince because we've been told to by the chief. And he's been told to send us by the bigwigs in London. Apparently, they want us to be "seen to be doing something". So belt up and keep driving, Lewis, it's not every day you get a chance to hobnob with Royalty.

Lewis *(taking out mobile)*: I'd better ring my wife and tell her I'm going to be late.

(Car is seen drawing up outside agreeable country mansion. Morse and Lewis are confronted by the dapper figure of Sir Alan Fitztightly)

Fitztightly: Oh, I suppose you are the two policemen we've been told to expect. His Royal Highness is in the Islamic Garden.

(Shot of Prince Charles bending over bed of nasturtium seedlings)

Charles: Come on, you little chaps, grow for Daddy.

Lewis *(sotto voce)*: He's a bloody nutter, sir.

Morse *(coughs and presents the Prince with his ID card)*: Excuse me, sir, Inspector Morse, Oxford CID. We'd just like to ask you a few questions about the death of your late wife.

Charles *(to seedlings)*: Talk amongst yourselves, chaps. I've just got to have a word with these policemen. *(To Morse)* How can I help you, Inspector?

Morse: Well, sir, I'd like to know where you were on the night in question, 31 August 1997, between the hours of 10pm and 2.36am.

Charles: Oh, gosh, that's quite tricky! I, er, I must have my old diary somewhere. They keep them for me.

(Cut to Library. Red-faced Charles is examining old leather-bound diary, while Lewis is spinning 15th-century globe in background)

Charles: Oh, yes, here it is! Er, oh gosh...

Morse: Is something the matter, sir?

Charles: No, not at all. I see that I was with a, er, a friend that night.

Morse: So would this "friend" be able to confirm that you were not in Paris on that night?

Charles: I'm sure she, I mean he, I mean my friend, will...

(Cut to Snug Bar of The Old Trout, a famous Thames-side pub)

Lewis *(placing two foaming pints of Dexter's Old Peculiar on table)*: He's covering up for something, sir, isn't he? If you ask me, he's the one that did it.

Morse: Well, I'm not asking you, Lewis. Which is just as well, since he clearly *didn't* do it.

Lewis: Then what was he up to that night, that he got so red-faced about?

Morse: What do you think he was doing, Lewis? It's obvious.

Lewis: Sir, you don't mean he was...

Morse: Yes, Lewis, that is exactly what I mean. Now get me another pint of that Old Peculiar.

Lewis: So the whole thing's been a complete waste of time?

Morse: Not for me Lewis. You're driving.

(Final shot of the car driving back to Oxford. Morse has his eyes closed as he listens to Don Giovanni. To be repeated every week for next five years...)

NEW BLOOD
LATEST ADDITIONS TO THE SAATCHI GALLERY
HORROR! SEE WITH YOUR OWN EYES!! BADLY DRAWN MEN AND WOMEN!
VIEW AT YOUR OWN RISK
NOT SUITABLE FOR THOSE OF A NERVOUS DISPOSITION
IN
NO ANIMALS WERE HARMED MAKING THESE EXHIBITS
ROLL UP! ROLL UP! LADIES AN' GENTLEMEN! I DARE YOU TO SEE THIS SHOW! IT'S DISGUSTING! IT'S REVOLTING!
SOUNDS GREAT, DAD!
HOW ANNOYING, I QUITE LIKE IT
DON'T WASTE IT SIR! MR SAATCHI WILL BUY IT!
DO YOU NOTICE HOW SAATCHI'S CHEQUE BOOK FOLLOWS YOU AROUND THE GALLERY?
EXIT
NOW THAT I LIKE!
MAYBE WE'LL GIVE THAT ROOM A MISS!

"Mr Humphrey, your test results are in..."

DAILY MAIL, FRIDAY, APRIL 2, 2004

What's Wrong With Charles Kennedy? YOU Decide!

a) He is an alcoholic wreck.

b) He is a crack cocaine addict.

c) He is dying of AIDS.

d) He is the Leader of the Liberal Democrats and we don't want you to vote for him.

Kennedy: Two shots

Can you remember where you were when you heard the news that Kennedy was dead drunk?

Phone now on 09997 42873 and win the next election!

Phone the Daily Mail now on 09997 42873 and share your memories!

A Liberal Democrat Doctor Writes

AS A Liberal Democrat doctor, I am often asked, "Doctor, you were sacked by Charles Kennedy. Can you give us an objective medical opinion about his drunkenness?"

The simple answer is, "Try and stop me."

What happens is that the doctor, or *Hades furia femina scornata,* to give her the full medical name, makes a diagnosis based on the following symptoms: an excess of bile and an enlarged spleen.

This causes the doctor to speculate that Charles Kennedy is a washed-up old soak who should resign at once and make way for a more talented member of the Liberal Party – possibly one with medical qualifications.

If you are worried about Charles Kennedy, you should consult a newspaper at once.

© A. Dr Jenny Tonge

A Surgeon Writes

AS A surgeon, I am often asked, "Do you want your job back?" I normally reply "yes" – to which the hospital governors respond, "Well, you're going to have to put those croutons back where they belong."

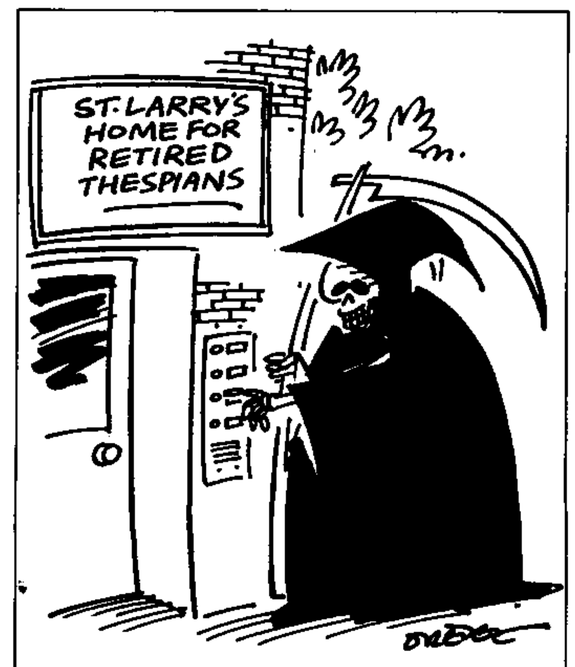
Exclusive To All Newspapers

HASH KENNEDHY GOT A DRINKSH PROBLEM?

by **Lunchtime O'Booze**

I SHAY thish (hic), Charles Kenner... Kenner... anyway... he'sh pished 24/7... I wash told this by a very good source... I can't remember hish name or indeed mine... but talking of source, I'll have another large one... *zzzzzz*

© Phil Glass, Pot & Kettle Productions.



"Five minutes Dame Hermione..."

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Sydney Carter, hymnwriter

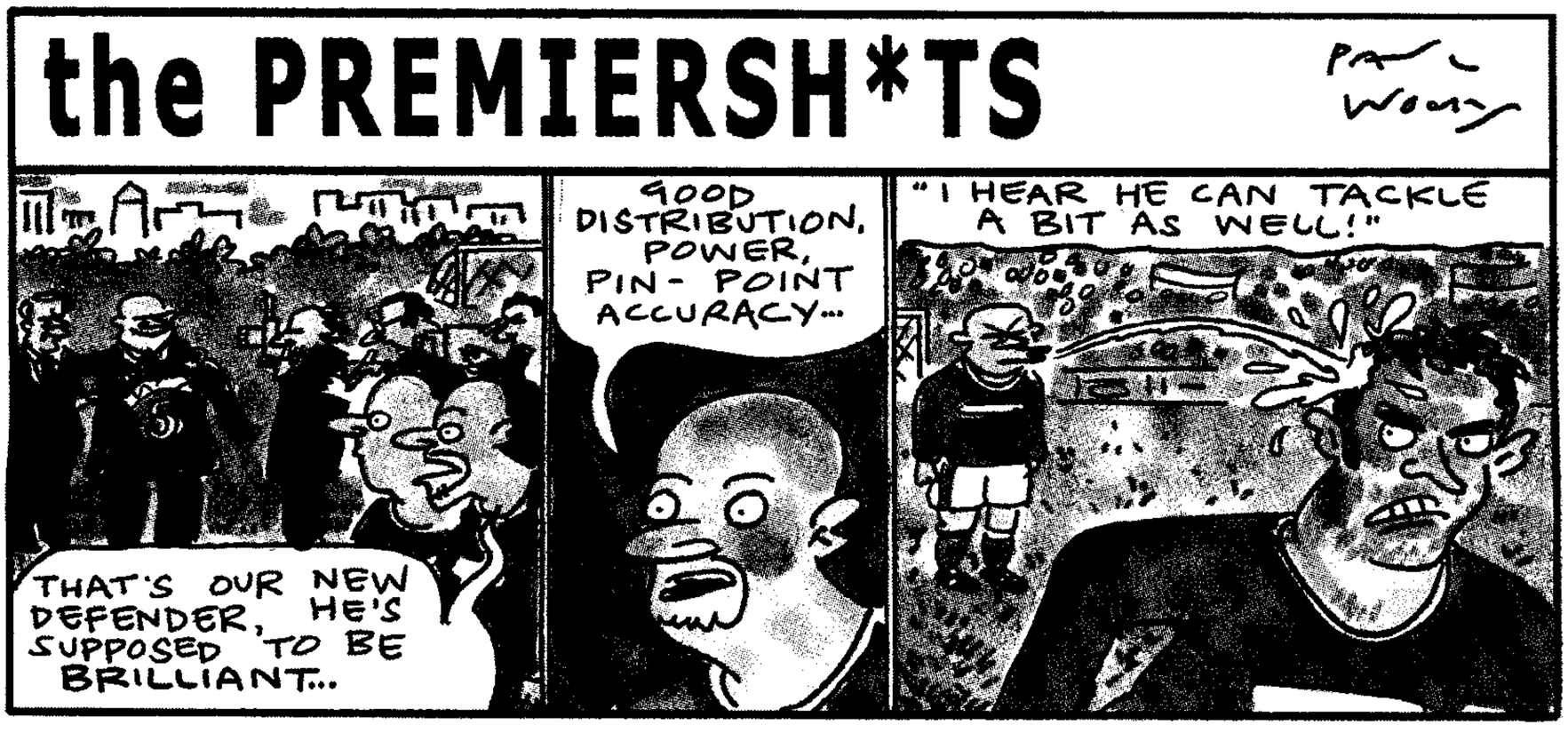
So. Farewell
Then Sydney
Carter,
Author of *The Lord Of The Dance.*

Keith and I
Remember
Singing it at
Assembly.

"I danced in the da-da
Da-da-da-da
Da
Dum-dum-da-da-da-
Da-da-dum-di-dum"

Unfortunately there is
Insufficient space
To recall the whole
Of your most famous
Hymn.

E.J. Thribb (17½),
"Lord Of The Verse"


the PREMIERSH*TS
PAUL WOOLEY
THAT'S OUR NEW DEFENDER, HE'S SUPPOSED TO BE BRILLIANT...
GOOD DISTRIBUTION, POWER, PIN-POINT ACCURACY...
"I HEAR HE CAN TACKLE A BIT AS WELL!"

DIARY

LADY ANNABEL GOLDSMITH

I was wearing a rather low-cut bathing suit which displayed my bosom to maximum advantage! It was unconventional in those days to wear a rather low-cut bathing suit to a formal dinner-party! But then I have always been a rather unconventional sort of woman!

Needless to say, the eyes of the men at the table were literally glued to my cleavage! So I decided to divert their attention by insisting on a round of silly games!

"I know what!" I shrieked, delightedly, "Let's play hunt the thimble!"

And with that I withdrew into the sitting-room, and got darling Mrs Stokes, who once cooked her perfect sherry trifle for Adolf Eichmann, to place a thimble down what many have been kind enough to describe as my remarkable cleavage!

"Hunt the thimble – ready, steady, go!" I whooped as I returned to the dining-room! In fact, I tried to make it easier for them by pointing at the likely area! But sadly not one of the gentlemen looked up, thank you very much!

On closer investigation, I discovered they were otherwise engaged in plopping their "members" (how I hate that word!) on the table to see whose was the largest!

Then they all got out their felt-tips, painted funny faces on them and re-enacted the Battle of Omdurman! "I know when I'm not wanted, gents!" I exclaimed, good-heartedly dipping into my own bosom for my thimble and retreating upstairs for an early night with something milky and a copy of the latest *Vogue*!

In those heady, far-off days, we certainly knew how to have fun! My grandmother, Edith, the seventh Marchioness of Londonderry taught me how! She had always been intent on injecting gaiety into life!

Her charmed circle would gossip like mad, play silly games, flirt with each other, tell outrageous jokes, widdle down the stairwell, and drink copious quantities of the delicious pre-war Londonderry champagne!

She even enjoyed a close friendship with the Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald! "He was an old-fashioned socialist," she wrote in her memoirs. "He loved beautiful things, gorgeous pageantry, fine silverware, dressing up in resplendent uniforms, being waited on hand and foot, and taking the cream of the British aristocracy up the arse!"

Throughout my life, we couldn't have had half so much fun without our full compliment of servants, all of them the most tremendous characters!

The marvellous thing was how much they respected us! I'll never forget what the inimitable Mr Chambers, Daddy's bathroom butler, said after vigorously wiping Daddy's behind after he had experienced a particularly severe dose of diarrhoea! He said, "It's come up beautiful, sir – and may I add what a pleasure and a privilege it has been for me to attend to you today!"

Sadly, Mr Chambers shot himself the next day. It could have been the most frightful blow, but thankfully the vacancy was soon filled!

When I first set eyes on Jimmy Goldsmith, I fell madly in love with him!

There was a simplicity about the way he would draw great bundles of notes out of his top pocket in a single movement that I found wholly irresistible!

Despite his debonair image, Jimmy preferred the simple things in life! His absolute favourite thing in the world was a simple boiled egg in bed, served by members of his junior airstaff in his simple private jet!

And he was simply marvellous with people! With a simple punch to the ribs, followed by a swift jab on the nose, he could always get them to do just what he wanted!

I'll never forget the time we met the famous Nelson Mandela, who – much to our surprise! – was black! I was helpless with laughter! But Jimmy was a businessman through and through, and he certainly wasn't going to mess up a contract by making a fuss about it!

I was wearing a low-cut night-dress at the time, and I noticed how much time Nelson spent pretending not to stare at my world-famous cleavage!

With his quick wit, Jimmy came straight to the point! "Oh, for fuck's sake, the man's a bloody nigger!" he erupted, banging a nearby table lightheartedly with his fist!

"Welcome to our country," said Nelly in that funny voice of his! By this time, I was almost weeing myself with laughter! But then I've always been unconventional!

"Call this a fucking country?!" replied Jimmy, quick as a flash, "It's more like a shit-hole! But I'll buy it anyway!"

Jimmy was always the most enormous fun!

Friends often ask me what it's like to have a nightclub named after one! I tell them that frankly I don't know what it would be like not to have a nightclub named after one!

Annabel's has always attracted the most amazing characters! "Lucky" Lucan would often drop by, and he would often peer at my bosoms!

But then he killed his nanny accidentally on purpose – and suddenly stopped coming!

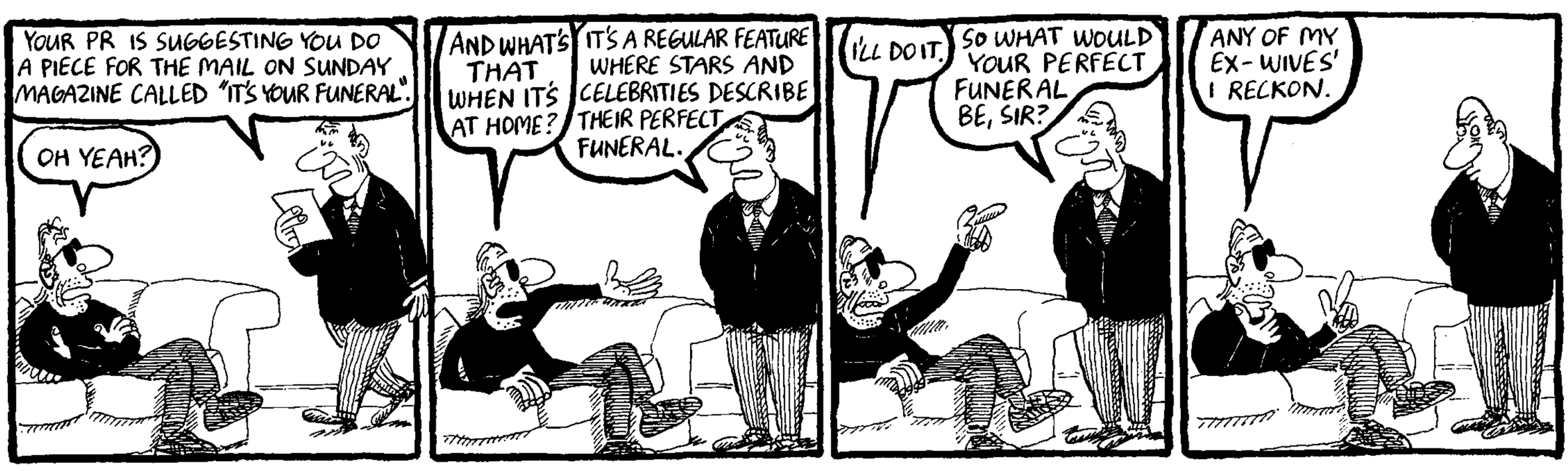
Nicky van Hoogstraaten was always enormously entertaining, with the most perfectly shined shoes you could imagine! I always enjoyed a dance with Armand Hammer when he was in town – even if I did notice his hands down my cleavage from time to time! I was once sorely tempted to tell him off – but Jimmy said don't be such a fucking spoilsport or you'll jeopardise the fucking deal!

You see, beneath it all, Jimmy was always so very vulnerable!

Another great character was John Aspinall! Aspers lost heaven knows how many keepers to his wild animals over the years, poor things! Aspers had the most perfect manners, and would always make the most tremendous point of apologising to their next of kin, if any! And nor would he charge the family for the loss of uniform! That's the kind of man he was!

I once took a party of underprivileged children to Aspers' zoo and – against my better judgement! – shut them all in the lions' cage while I nipped off to change into something more revealing! When I got back, there were only a few half-chewed socks and sandals left – and, goodness, I felt awful! But Jimmy insisted there's nothing any of us can do about the problems of the underprivileged! And at least the lions were able to enjoy a well-earned zizz!

As told to
CRAIG BROWN


YOUR PR IS SUGGESTING YOU DO A PIECE FOR THE MAIL ON SUNDAY MAGAZINE CALLED "IT'S YOUR FUNERAL".
OH YEAH?
AND WHAT'S THAT WHEN IT'S AT HOME?
IT'S A REGULAR FEATURE WHERE STARS AND CELEBRITIES DESCRIBE THEIR PERFECT FUNERAL.
I'LL DO IT.
SO WHAT WOULD YOUR PERFECT FUNERAL BE, SIR?
ANY OF MY EX-WIVES' I RECKON.

Literary Review

True Lies

The Master
Colm Toibin
(Picador, £15.99)

HOLLYWOOD has always believed that the words "based on a true story" will draw more viewers to a movie. A section of the public suspects that making things up is a waste of time and this prejudice becomes worse in serious times.

The novel is subject to the same pressure: the Booker, a prize for fiction, has been dominated by fact-based historical epics. Increasingly, it can seem that most new novels are either disguised autobiography (which bring the promise of authority) or tricked-up biography (which save time for both author and reader by bringing in a character we already recognise.)

Representing the second genre, and being heavily pushed for this year's Booker, is *The Master*, the fifth novel by the Irish writer Colm Toibin and, another sign of how fiction is becoming factual, one of five recent or impending novels featuring Henry James as a major character. (David Lodge's *Author, Author* is due in September.)

Toibin, in books such as *The Heather Blazing* and *The Blackwater Lightship*, has specialised in the examination of emotionally withdrawn and/or sexually ambiguous characters in stately sentences which look more to Victorian fiction than to Martin Amis. So Henry James, long considered by biographers to be a bisexual or homosexual virgin, represents a logical choice of subject.

In 11 chapters, each set during a single month between January 1895 and October 1899, Toibin follows James from the terrible failure of his London play *Guy Domville* to the recovery of his novelistic reputation with the stirring of his turn-of-century masterpieces. The result is a well-researched and engaging narrative but *The Master* dramatises three problems of biographical fiction.

The first is that Toibin, Irish and gay, is determined to claim James for both camps so that, for example, the second trip sends James on a country house weekend in Dublin so that he can discuss the shamrock roots of the James family and have an ambiguous encounter with a manservant who offers to come and tuck him up for the night. The narrative commandeers Oscar Wilde – gay, Irish and a successful playwright – as a constant counterpoint to James's failures and evasions in all areas.

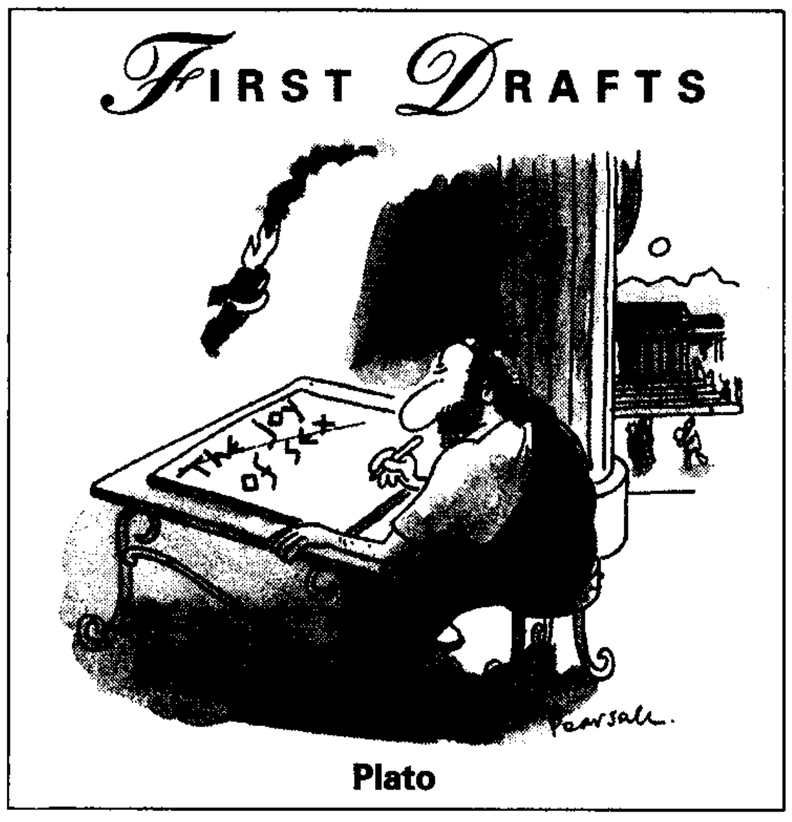
It's true that biographers generally have agendas as well – and that James was of Irish descent and that his celibacy was a resistance of men as well as women – but a biographer would provide footnotes and evidence. When a novelist employs such emphases, there's a fear that he's operating as a recruiting sergeant without admitting to the flag he's under.

The second difficulty is the recurrent one in artistic biopics: the dramatisation of inspiration. At several times in *The Master*, James is told stories or notices details which then turn up in his novels. For example, his observation of and reflection on the children of Oscar Wilde during the trial is seen to influence *The Turn Of The Screw*. This is interesting if true but a biographical novel has no way of making clear if it is. And some of the other moments of inspiration seem as crass as those scenes in Hollywood musical biopics when Mozart or Beethoven begins to tap out a now-famous symphony on a tavern table.

Toibin's biggest challenge, though, is language. The movie *Shakespeare In Love* isn't written in blank verse but there's an expectation that a novel about James will attempt a version of his voice: especially as Toibin's is written in the localised third person through the single consciousness of James. Toibin's decision is to be true to James's vocabulary and rhythms and locked-down emotions but to eschew the snaking sentences of the later style.

This is largely sensible although some of the punctuation is highly peculiar. At times, it's all commas: "Anyone, he thought, would be ashamed to conduct the minding of a young girl, who should, in any case, be indoors, from an upstairs window." This is presumably a stab at James's constant qualifications but, elsewhere, the syntax is so loose as to lose meaning: "He strutted about the place, being the only one it seemed not to realise that while he meant well, he did not matter." That central unpunctuated run of "it seemed not to realise that while he meant well" is ugly and unhelpful.

The bigger problem, though, is the paradox of the factual novel: we are drawn to them because they seem truer than fiction but have no way of knowing what is fiction and what is truth.



WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

Flourishing: Letters 1928-1946
Isaiah Berlin (Ed. Henry Hardy)
(Chatto & Windus, £30)

All Souls, Oxford, 1 July 1936
TO THE HON VENETIA STARBORGLING[1]

Dear Boffles,

I feel acute guilt & displeasure at having left the postage stamp that I borrowed from you some months ago, while staying at your very nice house in Hampshire[2], unreturned, the thought of having prevailed upon your essential goodness, fine nature, elegance of judgment &c being sufficient to plunge me into a gloom unrelieved by various events of whose relative magnitude I leave you to judge.

1. There is a civil war in Spain. This is really very serious.

2. Sammy's[3] non-elevation to the professorship of Greek. How this came, or did not, come about, is a source of cataclysmic misery, for we had done everything in our power, written to Frisk and Whiskers[4] about it &c. And Sammy – so mad & gay & snobbish & sweet & so disappointed. Hearing of his arch-rival Professor Vole's victory in the election – a learned, scholarly, unsuitable man – I at once rushed off to dine with him, & I think really consoled him by my insistence that it is the striking, original figures who survive in Oxford legend irrespective of whether they do any work or not.

3. Bobbety's[5] failure in Greats. This, I must admit, perplexed me gravely. He had done a fine Latin translation and a noble Greek unseen. While his inability to attend Schools for the final three papers undoubtedly counted against him, one would have thought his qualities of gentlemanliness and sympathetic understanding, not to mention his father's very agreeable residence in Perthshire, where I stayed last summer, would have redeemed him to some extent in the examiner's eyes... [*continues*]

1 The Hon Venetia Starborgling (1913–84), daughter of Lord Dull, Minister for Agriculture, February to March 1925.
2 Lucre Grange, near Fordingbridge. On his stay here in 1935, Berlin recorded that he tipped the butler 10/6d.
3 Samuel Ainsworth de Montmorency Drudge (1898–1970), Fellow of Wadham College, author of *Some Little Travels in the Levant* (1932).
4 To my eternal regret and shame I have been unable to decipher the real identities behind these amusing soubriquets.
5 The Hon Robert Twistleton-Byng (1914-99), son of Lord Mulcaster, sportsman, socialite and alcoholic.

LIBRARY NEWS

■ AS MORE and more libraries acquire glass atria, computers and coffee shop status, a survey of book borrowers in Huddersfield makes interesting reading.

The 1930s library building in the town centre – something of an architectural treasure – needs repair and experts have been asked to inspect its steel frame which may be corroding. In the light of this, councillors have been considering grandiose plans to demolish the library and redevelop the town centre plaza.

Kirklees council has had seven possible redevelopment schemes for the library and art gallery drawn up at taxpayers' expense. But in a survey of library users, 78 percent said they liked the current exterior of the library and nearly the same number said they felt the same way about the interior. Comments included: "priceless", "wonderful", "the best library in Yorkshire" and "perfect".

Careful restoration of the library would probably be the cheapest option by far — work on a similar steel-framed library in Burnley, Lancashire, cost £1.7m and has won several awards. The spare cash could be used to buy more books — stock levels being the only thing library users thought could be improved.

SNIPCOCK & TWEED
DO YOU HAVE THE JORDAN BOOK?
IT'S THE ONE BURSTING OUT OF ITS JACKET
IT COULD DO WITH COSMETIC SURGERY
IT'S BEEN PADDED OUT
POP-UP JORDAN BOOK
BEING JORDAN

Mother of a book

The Bad Mother's Handbook

Kate Long

(Picador, £12.99)

LIKE some crazed 24/7 freight lorry, forever veering from its course to take on fresh supplies and recruit new drivers, the commercial women's novel surges on endlessly across the publishing horizon.

No one quite knows where it will fetch up, and the route is lined with the bones of wannabes who guessed wrong or came to late to the party. Frivolity, maturity and plain old fashioned glamour have all been dragged on board and then swiftly jettisoned in its wake. Four or five years back it was all shags in flats in Earls Court. Then it was all Settling Down and Taking Things Very Seriously. Now, with demographics tugging spiritedly at the commissioning editors' sleeves, it's turned multi-generational, built on the astounding premise that, garsh, Mum and Gran were girls too back in some distant cranny of time, with their own problems and moist-eyed anxieties, Just Like Us.

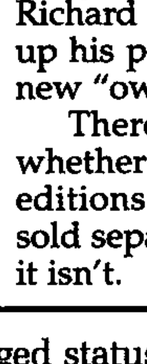
The Bad Mother's Handbook – now nestling in the hardback top ten, read last week on Radio Four – is an all-too perfect example of this burgeoning sub-genre. Karen, the generational pivot on which our flat-accented north-western saga turns, is an embittered 33 year old, life prematurely soured since her teenage impregnation by thick Steve, swiftly married and just as swiftly divorced.

Needless to relate, Karen's hopes are pinned on Charlotte, the product of this unhappy union, a bright girl booked for uni and the career that Mum never had. Sadly Charlotte blows it by getting knocked up by thick, feckless Paul ("It's yours. It's all yours. I don't want fuck all to do wi' it.") Meanwhile increasingly vacant Nan is wafting around the place looking on the bright side ("You'll be awreet. You'll see. God's good") while playing a starring role in the unravelling mystery of Karen's real parentage. Sizzling stuff, I tell you, in which the patter of tiny footsteps staggers all the way back into the dim, pre-war dawn.

Though their presence in no way constitutes anything as weighty as an influence, there are a number of literary ghosts gliding around in *The Bad Mother's Handbook*. Back in the bright 1960s, when cultural commentators were just beginning to get a handle on the, ah, permissive society, several brave young lady novelists plumped for this engaging theme: Margaret Drabble, for instance, in *The Millstone*, Andrea Newman in *The Cage* (bright girl gets knocked up by dim hunk, misses out on university, etc). Forty years ago, what with the prevailing moral climate and all, such items generally involved a desperate portentousness. Four decades later, on the other hand, their practitioners are disabled by the absence of any idea of the level on which they are trying to operate.

Take Ms Long here. Is she doing chirpiness? Is she doing schmaltz? Is she doing painful sincerity? To be sure, all three turn up in rapid succession and the effect is like watching an episode of *Absolutely Fabulous* rounded off with the arrival of a serial killer. One moment Karen is trading fatuous banter with Nan ("Phyllis Hector's had a hysterectomy, did I tell you?" "No mum, she hasn't. She's gone ex-directory"), the next she's at social services contemplating the ghastliness of her family background (real mother charged with manslaughter after her half-sister's death, etc) yet reassured that "You've been very brave. Whatever your life's been like, it's made you a strong person." There follows a Very Serious Homily on the duties of motherhood, which I'm afraid I shrieked over.

The socio-political backdrop – this is 1997, with Blair entering and Diana exiting – doesn't work in the least ("Sadness tightened my chest, and guilt" Karen thinks. "If she couldn't get it right, what chance have the rest of us?"), just plonked on the surface like a cake decoration. Charlotte, you'll be pleased to learn, ends up with a very nice boy who stokes up her confidence ("What I mean is that you're not afraid to swim against the tide. You're an *individual*") and is, bless us all, properly middle class ("Poor Mum" Charlotte thinks, lunching in his back garden, "She'd love to do this: Italian bread, wine, five cheeses, grapes.") Nan has a stroke and goes into a home. Karen manages a consolatory shag with beetle-browed Steve who promises to help out with his grandson. Oh and they win ten grand on the premium bonds. The whole thing is as false to life as an episode of *EastEnders* or a copy of the *Daily Mail* and, *inter alia*, as corny as a wheatfield in Oklahoma.



REMAINDERS OF THE DAY

■ WHILE the Penguin paperback edition of Nick Hornby's About a Boy is priced at £7.99, at Sainsbury's in Camden High Street it can be bagged for just £1. The provenance of this bargain, displayed alongside similarly-priced copies of Wuthering Heights and The Mayor of Casterbridge, is curious.

All copies bear the legend "Great Reads Collection £2.50 each when purchased with The Daily Express. Not to be sold separately." This begs the question of who offloaded the books to the supermarket: was it Hornby's publisher Penguin or Express proprietor Richard Desmond wanting to tidy up his porn warehouses before the new "owners" took over?

There is also the question of whether the resale of such special editions is legal. The "Not to be sold separately" tag would suggest it isn't.

Pseuds Corner

I have long been under the impression that fellatio fell into desuetude with the decline of the Roman Empire and the Gothic desolation of the communal bath, to return to fashion in France in the age of Toulouse-Lautrec, at the height of the perfume trade and the new etiquette for consuming asparagus.

BRIAN SEWELL
Evening Standard

At times the images here are so atomised, so farouchely pointillist, so non-colourfast that you'd think they had spent a month in the fast-spin cycle of a particle accelerator.

NIGEL ANDREWS on the film 21 Grams
Financial Times

'...multi-faceted transformative devices... [a] tool whereby users manage space, time and the boundaries around the self.'

DR MICHAEL BULL appraises the iPod, quoted in *BBC News Magazine* website

But there is neither wistfulness nor infantilism in their nostalgia: rather, it comes across as heroic – a declamation of new values for a new age, the triumphant expression of which can be seen in Schlesinger's portrait of Ossie Clark striding through a crowded London restaurant in 1973. In razor-pleated high-waisted cream trousers, with a blue and scarlet polka-dot bow-tie, lavender blue braces and wedge-soled sandals, he is every inch the conquering hero: the artist boulevardier for whom social mobility knows no limits.

MICHAEL BRACEWELL reviews *A Chequered Past: My Visual Diary of the 60s and 70s* by PETER SCHLESINGER
Guardian

Ineluctably mitigating the radicalism here is the inescapable recurring freakishness of the men. Instead of allowing us to see that the women choose their sexual prospects out of discretion, care, taste, not desperation, the underlying freakishness of the men conforms to the underlying essentialist myths of city women as vampiric succubi...The freakshow mentality of Sex in the City ends up being neither a post-feminist nor post-gay interrogation of privileged white male heterosexuality...but a reification of the very privileged status of the category. It is the women themselves, shakily stuck in their haunted liminal position between representing both "real" women and gay men, who are ultimately revealed as the chief freaks...[continues]

DAVID GREVEN, 'Reading *Sex in the City*', *Guardian*

They're going to harden it up. It's not going to be: "My sister is sleeping with my father" It's going to be: "My sister is sleeping with my father, but they're both interested in the Middle East.'"

NICKY CAMPBELL on his new TV chat-show, *Observer*

Pseuds Corporate

Our mission is to be the pre-eminent provider of outsourced processes in our chosen markets. We liberate clients and employees creating exceptional opportunities both for them and for our shareholders.

LIBERATA mission statement, posted on wall of Peckham DSS office

CONTRIBUTORS: M. Sloan, Margaret Drazin, Rob Bellhouse, James Dore, P. Reilly, Pauline Kelly, Melissa Viney

£10 paid for all entries

Correction: We misquoted Vivienne Westwood in Pseuds Corner as saying "I have great intellectual capacity..." In the Sunday Times, she actually said "I have great intellectual curiosity..."

IN THE BACK

PFI

Worcestershire sauce

BACK where the whole PFI argument started to get heated – at Worcestershire Royal Infirmary in Worcester – they are still counting the "unexpected" costs of PFI.

The Worcestershire Acute Hospitals Trust has been locked in anxious argument with Catalyst, the consortium that built the hospital by PFI. To settle the argument, the trust brought in an unnamed "expert" who came down firmly on the side of the private companies in Catalyst. The result has been a doubling of the annual payment by the trust (ie taxpayers) to the company, from £1.25m to £2.5m.

This "unexpected" blow has hit the trust hard. It announces a total debt over two years of £25m and has had to borrow £25m from the West Midlands South strategic health authority. The trust's plight will get much worse as it struggles to pay back that sum over the next few years during every one of which it will have to fork out more millions to the Catalyst companies.

Money down the tube

AN important word in the PFI lexicon is "re-financing". This is the process whereby companies who can't make enough on the sums they have agreed should be paid to them by the taxpayer manage to get their contracts "re-financed" – ie they are given huge slices of extra public money as a reward.

These cases crop up all the time. The most expensive in March so far has been the "re-financing" of the expensive deal between the government and Tubelines, a consortium that runs the Jubilee, Northern and Piccadilly lines on the London underground.

The deal lobs an extra £10m each to the three companies in the consortium. Two of the lucky firms are British and old *Eye* favourites – Jarvis and Amey.

Cooking the Green Book

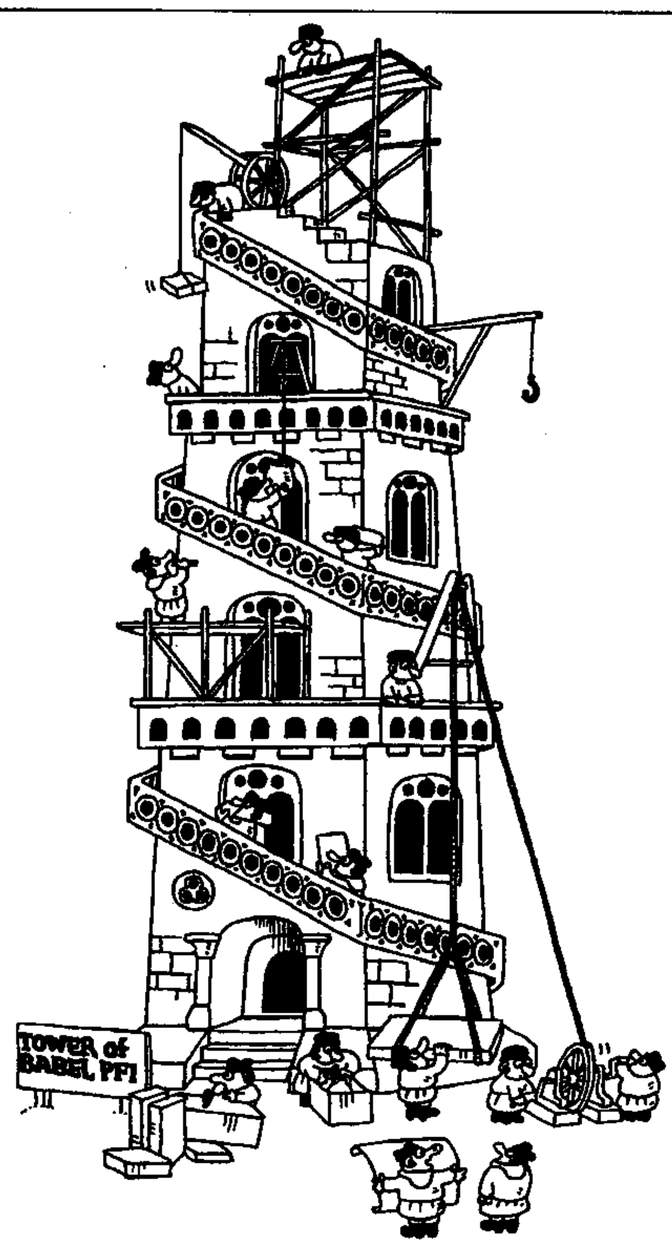
MARTIN BLAIKLOCK, an independent financial consultant, enjoyed the *Eye*'s special report on the private finance initiative and draws our attention to yet another discrepancy in the PFI jungle.

He shows how the new edition of the government's Green Book, the bible on investment for all public authorities and agencies, makes nonsense of the "public sector comparators" on which so many PFI projects pretend to depend.

These "comparators" have to be drawn up before any PFI project gets the go-ahead in order to prove that the PFI or PPP (public-private partnership) proposal is cheaper than the old system of public procurement. The *Eye* has had some fun with these comparators in the past. More often than not they are "tweaked" (fiddled) to come up with the right answer. But the differences between the old Green Book method of calculating discount rates (and other matters) and the new one are likely to lead to much more shocking discrepancies.

For example, Mr Blaiklock has calculated the difference for the new PPP hospital at West Middlesex. Under the old Green Book system, the public sector comparator was £129.3m, the PPP a mere snip at £123.8m. Naturally the health authority went for the PPP. But wait. Using figures in the national audit office report on the hospital, Mr Blaiklock calculates that under the new Green Book system, the public sector comparator for the hospital comes out at around £160m and the PPP at £182m. In other words, under the new recommended system of calculation the PPP is substantially higher than the public one.

Will the government ever start enforcing its own rules? Or will it continue to back the discredited PFI/PPP projects regardless of cost?



"It's over time and budget, but the government will bail us out"

Sewage works!

AWG (formerly Anglian Water) has just sold its one-third stake in the £100m Tay Wastewater PFI project, which it signed in 2001 with public utility Scottish Water. The lucky buyer is that well-known sewage expert, er, Hendersons Private Capital's PFI fund.

Neither party has given any indication how much money AWG is making from it. The PFI project was taken on by a company called Catchment Tay Ltd, a joint venture between AWG, United Utilities and a company called International Water Ltd (owned by US giant Bechtel and Italian company Edison).

Among its other achievements International Water bought the privatised Bolivian city Cochabamba's water authority in 1999 and doubled the prices. After a general strike, mass demonstrations and the shooting of six demonstrators, the privatisation was reversed. Residents of Arbroath, Dundee and Carnoustie will be depending on these rather remote firms until 2031 for sewage treatment and clean beaches on their popular coastline.

AWG is a private company but earnestly declares on its website: "The public sector heritage of AWG means we understand the unique pressures our clients are under and can help them overcome obstacles and achieve their goals." Perhaps it was this commitment to "public sector heritage" that impressed another public body recently to award a PFI contract to another consortium that included AWG.

In January, Consort Healthcare, a consortium including Balfour Beatty and bankers HSBC and Royal Bank of Scotland, as well as AWG, was named "preferred bidder" to build the £521m Birmingham acute and adult psychiatric hospital by PFI and run it for 30 years. This is the consortium that has been responsible for the disastrous Edinburgh Infirmary PFI (see *Eye passim*).

ASYLUM

Back to the torture

REFUGEES who are forcibly deported to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are being delivered directly into the hands of torturers by home office ministers, according to evidence gathered by charities and human rights groups.

The home office continues to deport Congolese asylum seekers on the advice of a report which says: "The British ambassador to the DRC… has not seen any evidence to indicate that returned failed asylum seekers are persecuted on arrival in Kinshasa."

The UK charity Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID), which provides legal services to people held in UK detention centres, says that of three deportees who have been removed since October 2003, to its knowledge two have ended up in the Central Prison of Makala. One, who cannot be named for his own safety, managed to call his partner in the UK to report that he was being arrested. He was later located in prison by a witness known to local human rights organisations, who described the "bad conditions of his detention".

BID also describes the case of "DE", a deportee whose solicitor in the UK asked him to call her as soon as he arrived in Kinshasa. She didn't hear from him for two weeks and when he did call he explained that he had bribed a prison guard in Makala to let him make the call. Conditions in Makala are appalling, with NGOs in Congo reporting that 146 people died in the prison in 2002, mainly as a result of malnutrition and lack of basic medical treatment.

The UK immigration service has even permitted representatives of the DRC interior ministry to visit and interview Congolese detainees in UK detention centres – an extraordinary thing to do when people have sought asylum from a regime with a horrific human rights record. A home office spokesman told the *Eye*: "This is necessary as the immigration service cannot enforce the returns of failed asylum seekers unless they have proper documentation."

An Austrian Red Cross report to the United Nations high commission for refugees (UNHCR) notes that the UNHCR has received reports of deportees being handed over to the intelligence services by DRC immigration at Kinshasa airport. Their status as refused asylum seekers was made obvious by their arrival on a charter flight. Human rights groups and NGOs on the ground in DRC say that anyone who has sought asylum by claiming a military or political background faces "arbitrary detention and ill-treatment" on their return. The very act of claiming asylum may be seen as having brought the DRC into disrepute abroad. "Deportation to the DRC should be avoided… People who are returned without any assurance that the government does not hold any grudge against them could be in serious trouble," adds the report.

Netherlands-based NGO Docu-Congo has also gathered evidence relating to asylum seekers deported by the Dutch government to Kinshasa, including accounts of disappearances, interrogation, detention and persecution.

In March 2002 the UK deported 13 unsuccessful asylum seekers on a charter flight. One made it back to the UK to claim asylum again, telling BID what happened to the deportees soon after arrival: "We were placed in a lorry and taken to a prison. I do not know which one as it was too dark to be able to tell. On the way we were beaten by the soldiers who were guarding us in the lorry." BID has been unable to trace any of the other passengers on that flight or get a satisfactory answer from the immigration service about what happened to them. The *Eye* asked the home office whether the fate of those deportees had ever been investigated. The bland reply: "The UK is satisfied that Kinshasa is safe and secure enough to allow failed asylum seekers to be returned."

POLICE 5

Pensioned off

DESPITE assurances that allegedly bent police officers can no longer avoid disciplinary action by retiring from the force, a senior Manchester detective has been allowed to draw his £28,000-a-year pension in the middle of a criminal investigation against him.

Lancashire police are investigating claims that Det Chief Inspector Kenny Caldwell perverted the course of justice by deliberately withholding vital evidence and lying during the trial of nine men who were accused of murder. But in what is believed to be the first case of its kind, lawyers are to challenge via judicial review the decision of Mike Todd, Greater Manchester chief constable, to allow Caldwell to retire.

Caldwell was blamed by a high court judge for concealing documents that implicated suspects other than those who were in the dock accused of the murder in September 1999 of David Barnshaw who was burned alive in the boot of his car. Condemning the detective's "deliberate" misconduct, Mr Justice Penry-Davey said: "A dishonest attempt by anybody involved in the [justice] process strikes at the heart of what constitutes a fair trial."

Throwing out the case at Preston crown court last year against Arran Coghlan and eight other men, the judge said failings by Caldwell and two other officers – DI David Smith and DI Darren Shenton – were so serious he was referring the matter to the director of public prosecutions. Smith was accused of "not telling the truth" about an informer and Shenton was "grossly negligent" for failing to pass on crucial intelligence.

Lancashire police, supervised by the police complaints authority (PCA), were called in to investigate. But the officers were not initially suspended – not until Smith was also accused of lying during the Harold Shipman inquiry (Smith had been in charge of the first bungled investigation into the mass-murdering GP).

Caldwell, although moved to a non-investigative role, was not suspended until the *Manchester Evening News* revealed that he was about to start lecturing at Manchester university on, er, investigating murders. The newspaper pointed out that his imminent retirement (the university prospectus described him as recently-retired, even though at that stage he wasn't) would enable him to escape disciplinary action in the Barnshaw case – and in another investigation into his activities.

Caldwell was one of a number of Manchester officers separately accused of perverting the course of justice by trying to clear up unsolved crimes in their area by persuading local criminals to admit them as "taken into considerations" or TICs. In some cases there were large numbers of offences which they had not committed or could not have committed.

The day after the *MEN* article, Greater Manchester announced that Caldwell had been suspended: "In the light of further and new information being brought to our attention, it has been decided to suspend a senior police officer."

Everyone – including the PCA and Lancashire – assumed he would remain suspended until the outcome of their inquiries. Imagine their surprise when it emerged before Christmas that the suspension had been lifted and Caldwell had been allowed to retire on full pension.

When solicitor Fiona Murphy, who is acting for the men involved in the bungled Barnshaw trial, protested to Manchester, she was told that Caldwell had been suspended pending the "TIC" doctoring of crime figures investigation and not the more serious Lancashire/PCA investigation. At the conclusion of the TIC investigation, Caldwell had received a written warning. That meant his suspension was lifted and, as he had 30 years' service, he was entitled to retire. There was no need to inform the PCA because his suspension was not related to its investigation.

This is all very curious; not least because the TIC inquiry had been going on for months before Caldwell's suspension. And the decision to suspend him immediately followed the *Manchester Evening News*' investigation into the collapse of the Barnshaw case and its concerns about his planned retirement.

Greater Manchester police refused to answer any questions about Caldwell or about whether Smith too could leave the service as he is suspended only in relation to the Shipman affair. But such retirements are a serious issue that has long concerned MPs, lawyers and judges after a series of cases involving serious miscarriages of justice.

Sir William Macpherson sought to address the issue in the Stephen Lawrence inquiry by recommending that officers should be liable for disciplinary action for up to five years beyond retirement. But home office ministers rejected that on the grounds that chief constables can achieve the same end by suspending officers to delay retirement "in the public interest" pending the outcome of an inquiry. Home office guidelines state that this should be done when complaints and allegations are serious and could result in a criminal or disciplinary conviction, likely to lead to the sack or a demotion.

How Greater Manchester's chief constable believes allowing Caldwell to retire on full pension will restore faith in the system will be a key question for the judicial review.

FOLLOW-UPS...

■ **CUSTODY DEATH:** Jason Paul, who claimed police implicated him to deflect attention from their own failings over the death in custody of black paratrooper Christopher Alder (see *Eyes passim*), has won a second chance to sue Humberside police.

Alder choked to death while laying on the floor of a police station with his hands cuffed behind his back. Five officers stood around doing nothing.

Readers will recall that an inquest jury decided Alder had been unlawfully killed, but all five officers were acquitted of manslaughter and neglect of duty by a crown court jury. Paul had been arrested after trying to stop a fight between Alder and another man outside a nightclub earlier in the evening. He had struck Alder once during the altercation but had gone voluntarily to the police after hearing of Alder's death.

He was initially arrested on suspicion of murder and later charged with GBH — a charge that was later dropped by the crown prosecution service (CPS). Last year his claim for damages was thrown out by a judge who ruled there was no evidence of police using him to cover their own failings. The court of appeal ruled that the judge was wrong and ordered a retrial.

MMR

Library lifeline

THE continuing controversy over the mumps, measles and rubella (MMR) triple vaccine has prompted calls for an international vaccine safety library to be set up to help parents, guardians and recipients of vaccines.

The proposal in last week's *Lancet* comes from Dr Tom Jefferson, coordinator of the highly-regarded Cochrane Vaccines Field in Rome. Last year he and others published a review on the evidence of MMR vaccine safety. It concluded that "current evidence made an association between MMR and autism unlikely", but it found that most studies did not answer the question and the handful that did "exhibited fundamental methodological weaknesses".

In his call for a database independent of government, he says that none of the studies was published with a warning of its limitations "which may call into question publishing journals' grasp of the epidemiological and statistical issues raised".

One of the biggest limits on using existing data to answer the autism question was that the original field trials were not run long enough, and the universal nature of the vaccination programme meant that getting a credible "control group" of unvaccinated children was now all but impossible.

Jefferson says that by pooling every piece of evidence from published studies, technical reports, researchers' files and institutional archives would help minimise loss of important data and "maximise our chances of giving scientifically credible and timely answers to future allegations". "Most of all, evidence needs to be analysed and interpreted in an unbiased manner to allow those who receive vaccines or their guardians to make an informed choice," he said.

His proposal is already gaining support. *Pulse* magazine reported that GPs were in favour, as was David Hincliffe, chair of the Commons health committee.

The initiative comes as it emerged that lawyers involved in the MMR legal action believed they would have succeeded in their claim against the vaccine manufacturers had they proceeded exclusively on the gut disease suffered by the children. More work needed to be done if they were ever to show an association with autism.

A report about the future legal aid funding said: "There is a broad measure of support for Dr Wakefield's evidence on the gastroenterological case." It concluded: "Given that the measles virus is capable of causing inflammation and the presence of the virus at the location of the inflammation, and the absence of any other cause of the inflammation, we consider that it is probable that the new variant bowel disease is being driven by the vaccine strain measles virus."

TAX AVOIDANCE

Save the Wales

WHILE chancellor Gordon Brown introduced his budget clampdown on the promoters of tax avoidance schemes with a great fanfare and acres of coverage, he didn't explain why he continues to overlook the most flagrant tax-dodging by the richest in the land.

The rules allowing non-domiciled individuals to avoid tax on most of their income remain unaltered for another year. Thus, after two terms a Labour government that came to power denouncing the iniquity of tax avoidance by the rich continues to preserve the tax privileges of the, er, super-rich.

One of the strongest and most influential opponents of taxing the non-doms was Brown's special adviser on tax, Chris Wales, who joined the government in May 1997 from Arthur Andersen (RIP). After protecting the interests of so many rich people for so long, Mr Wales has decided it's time to become one of them himself. And on 16 March, the day before the budget, US investment bank Goldman Sachs announced his appointment as a managing director.

Many of the notoriously wealthy Goldman executives living in London aren't domiciled in the UK and will be very thankful for Mr Wales's efforts during his years in the treasury, which will have saved them millions of pounds in taxes. They can be expected to show their gratitude in time-honoured fashion by multiplying his old public sector salary many times over.

Meanwhile, the prime minister chose the London offices of Goldman Sachs for his latest speech on the economy. He marvelled at the bank's successes but clean forgot to mention the $110m fine Goldmans secured from the US regulator last year for fiddling its research – or the $40m fine the bank has just paid for ripping off US mutual funds.

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

WHILE, not surprisingly, attention post-Penrose has concentrated on the demands for government compensation due to regulatory failure, Equitable Life victims may be on firmer ground with the claim for negligence and breach of duty against auditor Ernst & Young.

Because of the litigation – due in court perhaps a year from now – Lord Penrose did not address the issue of E&Y's failings in his report. But there is little doubt in the opinion of those with detailed knowledge of the Equitable audit history that, despite Penrose's condemnation of the Equitable executive directors, the auditors are in a weak position when it comes to defending the £2.6bn claim.

E&Y was Equitable's auditor from 1990 until it was sacked by the new board in 2001. As Penrose makes clear in his report, Equitable's fatal policy of "over-bonusing" – promising and paying bigger bonuses than its finances could justify – had already undermined the mutual before the crisis provoked by the escalating cost of its guaranteed annuity rate (GAR) policies began to bite from 1993.

But after 1993, when chief executive and, as Penrose sees it, chief villain Roy Ranson told the board about the GAR problem, auditor E&Y was on notice that it should pay close attention to the Equitable accounts and particularly its provisions and reserves. In fact E&Y did little or nothing to alert policyholders until it was too late. And even when the 1998 accounts first reflected the possibility of the GAR time bomb going off, the estimated provision for damage was put at just £200m. It turned out to be nearer £3bn and forced Equitable to close.

So how could E&Y have been so wrong? The answer seems to lie very much in that old problem of an over-closeness between auditor and client. Thurber believed dogs came to reflect their owners; and given enough stroking and rewards, so do auditors who get too close to the companies they audit. They identify with the corporate goals and policies of those they are supposed to be monitoring on behalf of the company's owners.

That was certainly the case with Equitable and Ernst & Young, according to those who have studied their relationship. The same individuals were involved for far too long with the audit. Those who agreed and went along with the domineering and "manipulative" Ranson followed the same unquestioning course with his successors Alan Nash and Chris Headdon.

E&Y was well rewarded for its loyalty. From 1993 it was paid more than £4m in fees by Equitable. As the GAR problem grew after 1998, the accountants' fees mushroomed to more than £2m, more than half that figure for non-audit work related to the GAR litigation which ended in 2000 with the law lords rejecting Equitable's shabby attempt to renege on its guarantees.

The auditor who could have most to answer on Equitable may well be Paul McNamara, the client service audit partner at Ernst & Young who handled the Equitable audit from 1991 onwards.

McNamara is an auditor with an unfortunate ability to find himself in the wrong place at the wrong time. In 1995 he was at the centre of the landmark case which saw 2,000 Lloyd's "names" win compensation against the auditors of the Merrett syndicate who were found negligent, along with former Lloyd's deputy chairman and leading underwriter Stephen Merrett. The auditing firm was Ernst & Whinney. The auditor was Paul McNamara.

"Looks like the shareholders' action group really meant business"

Mr Justice Cresswell ruled that Ernst & Whinney, which by then had merged into Ernst & Young, had been negligent in wrongly allowing the underwriters to close two years of accounts in 1982-1984 which should have been left open due to possible liabilities caused by "run-off" contracts for long-tail business like asbestos and pollution claims. At issue was the fact that the auditors had not disputed the levels of reserves provided by the syndicate. Echoes of Equitable and its guaranteed rate annuities?

The auditors spent weeks checking the syndicate's own books but only one day on each of the ten "run-off" contracts Merrett had acquired from other insurers. E&Y produced graphs of claims patterns but chose to ignore them though they showed money would soon run out to meet those claims. "These graphs really did not go anywhere in our thought processes," McNamara told the judge.

Cresswell said that he found against E&Y "with particular regret" and sympathised with McNamara who had faced tight deadlines and appeared "to have been subject to an unduly heavy burden of work".

Ernst & Young had a big Lloyd's business with 40 percent of the underwriters as clients. In 1983 McNamara was also involved in the audit of another Lloyd's disaster in the making, one of the Outhwaite syndicates. The Outhwaite "names" settled some of their claims for £116m in 1992 but brought other claims for later years, including against E&Y, in 1996. These did not proceed to court due to the Lloyd's overall settlement of claims from "names". Nor did other claims brought by the Wellington syndicates over reinsurance provided by Outhwaite.

As a result of the Cresswell ruling E&Y was ordered to pay 20 percent of the damages awarded to the Merrett syndicate. This was estimated by the accountants at £15m.

By the time of this ruling McNamara was the Equitable audit partner and it was in 1995 that for the first time the company indicated to policy-holders that there was a GAR problem by cutting the final bonuses. Yet the Equitable accounts stayed silent on this issue for another three years.

Merrett was not Paul McNamara's only day in court. He was also called to give evidence in the celebrated Blue Arrow trial in 1991 – the year he took over as Equitable's auditor – over alleged deception of the stock market. McNamara advised NatWest Investment Bank over the handling of its shares in the recruitment business after the 1987 "rights" issue flop.

The bank and seven individuals were subsequently acquitted. McNamara was accused by defence counsel of tailoring his evidence to "cover the backside" of Ernst & Whinney because he had denied that he had been given full details of the Blue Arrow shareholdings. This denial was contradicted by the County NatWest financial control director. But McNamara did admit that nobody at E&W had calculated the significant percentage of Blue Arrow's share capital the holdings represented!

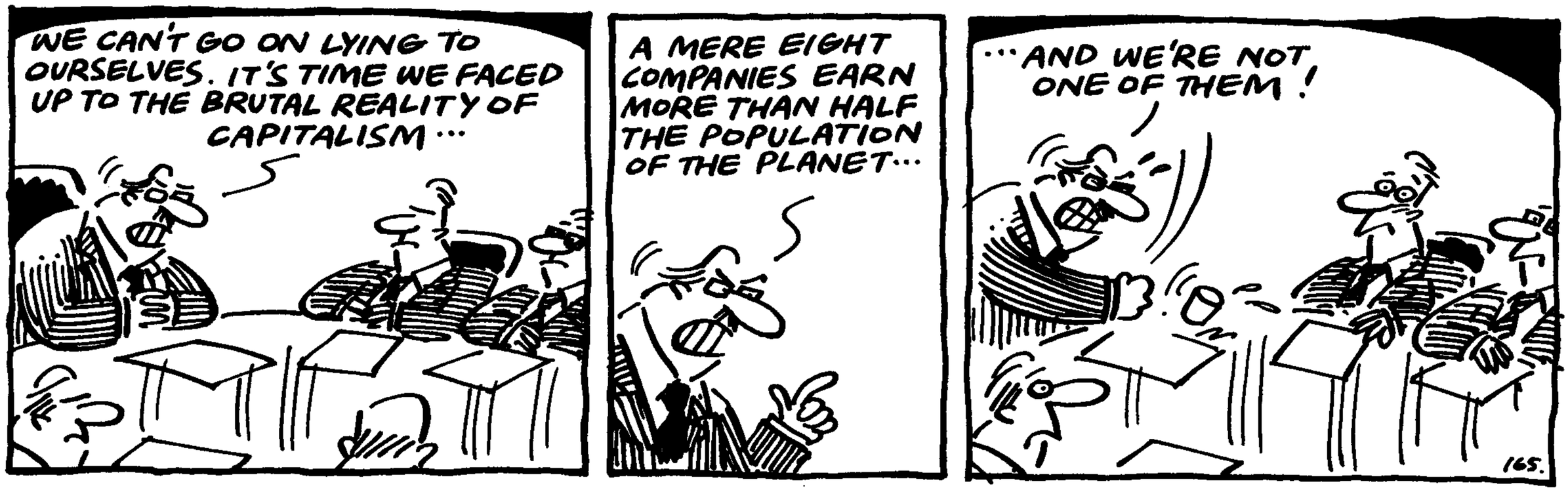
The Equitable case is certain to focus on the apparent over-closeness between McNamara and the mutual's executives and the extent to which he accepted their interpretation of both the bonus policy and the GAR liabilities. E&Y may argue that bonuses were no concern of the auditor; but that is hard to reconcile with the impact of the bonus policy on financial reserves – a point made by Penrose in his verdict that Equitable was the "author of its own misfortunes" by "over-bonusing".

It is beyond argument that the GAR liability was a matter for the auditors and one upon which they should have not rushed so readily to accept the Equitable explanation that it was not significant. But there are also questions to answer for McNamara's other partners headed by top man Nicholas Land. What actions did they take to question or independently review the firm's audit policy and actions at Equitable once the problems arose and the litigation began? The answer seems to be not much.

Those with knowledge of the case suggest that E&Y was only too happy to go along with McNamara and Equitable until it was too late. No doubt the large and growing larger fees had nothing to do with that assessment.

E&Y will claim, with some justification, that it was misled by the Equitable executives. What is certain is that the accountants weren't told the truth about the reinsurance agreement that wasn't which allowed Equitable to magically remove

THE DIRECTORS — DREDGE & RIGG

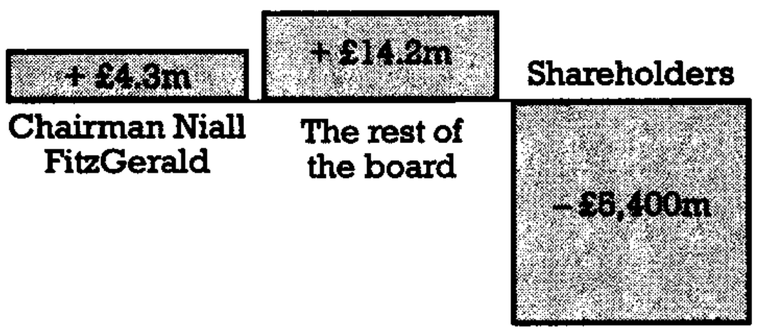

WE CAN'T GO ON LYING TO OURSELVES. IT'S TIME WE FACED UP TO THE BRUTAL REALITY OF CAPITALISM ...
A MERE EIGHT COMPANIES EARN MORE THAN HALF THE POPULATION OF THE PLANET...
...AND WE'RE NOT ONE OF THEM!
165.

Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Unilever's Niall FitzGerald

Winners and losers at Unilever in the past year...



£700m from its liabilities in 1998 and suggest that the maximum GAR liability it faced was £200m – or more likely only £50m. The reinsurance only worked as long as the legal advice that Equitable could renege on the guarantees stood and there were no claims. The moment the court of appeal ruled against Equitable in 2000 the reinsurance disappeared and it became a financing agreement.

But why did E&Y not know that and make the position clear? Because the side letter signed by Headdon to the reinsurers asserting that there would be no claims was kept from the auditors. But what efforts did they make to check on the agreement with the reinsurers? Obviously not enough.

At the heart of that over-trusting or too cosy approach was the "risk based audit" policy adopted for many years by big auditors like E&Y. This meant that to save time and ensure audit fees were not too loss making, the checks were concentrated on where risks were perceived. And if the directors were not seen as crooks, they were not treated as such and their word accepted.

That helps explain what E&Y did and did not do at Equitable – and at the US healthcare group HealthSouth, which managed to overstate profits by $3bn without auditor E&Y noticing. Again by the time the risk was appreciated it was too late. And the auditors' and Equitable's judgement was after all justified by the initial but then overruled high court decision on the guarantees in 1999.

For all these reasons E&Y cannot look forward with any enthusiasm to next year's court case. A settlement looks more than likely, although perhaps not until the doors of the court beckon.

How much could Equitable win? Certainly nothing like £2.6bn – £1bn relates very speculatively from the loss of any chance of selling the business. It will probably depend a lot on E&Y's professional indemnity insurance cover. It will be surprising if that goes much beyond £250-£350m. But that would be well beyond the largest award so far – £68m paid by Coopers & Lybrand over Maxwell. But against that are mounting legal costs already north of £5m.

Meanwhile E&Y is likely to be looking to delay the day of judgement. Not just in the high court but also in the disciplinary proceedings being prepared by the bean counters' Joint Disciplinary Scheme. That is expected to begin within the next few months. It is expected that the JDS will be highly critical of Ernst & Young and its number crunching.

E&Y can be expected to fight to delay any tribunal hearing or finding against the firm until after the civil case. It has already tried that trick once, failing in a 2002 bid to prevent the JDS even beginning an investigation before the civil case was resolved . Even though any disciplinary proceedings might not anyway be decided by the time the civil case starts, E&Y has already shown it has no wish to be judged by its peers over Equitable while the civil case is out there.

The Equitable scandal is one more argument for compulsory rotation of auditors and audit partners. The former is an argument the big firms do not want to hear because of the potential loss in fees. But it may be the only answer to the auditor's version of regulatory capture.

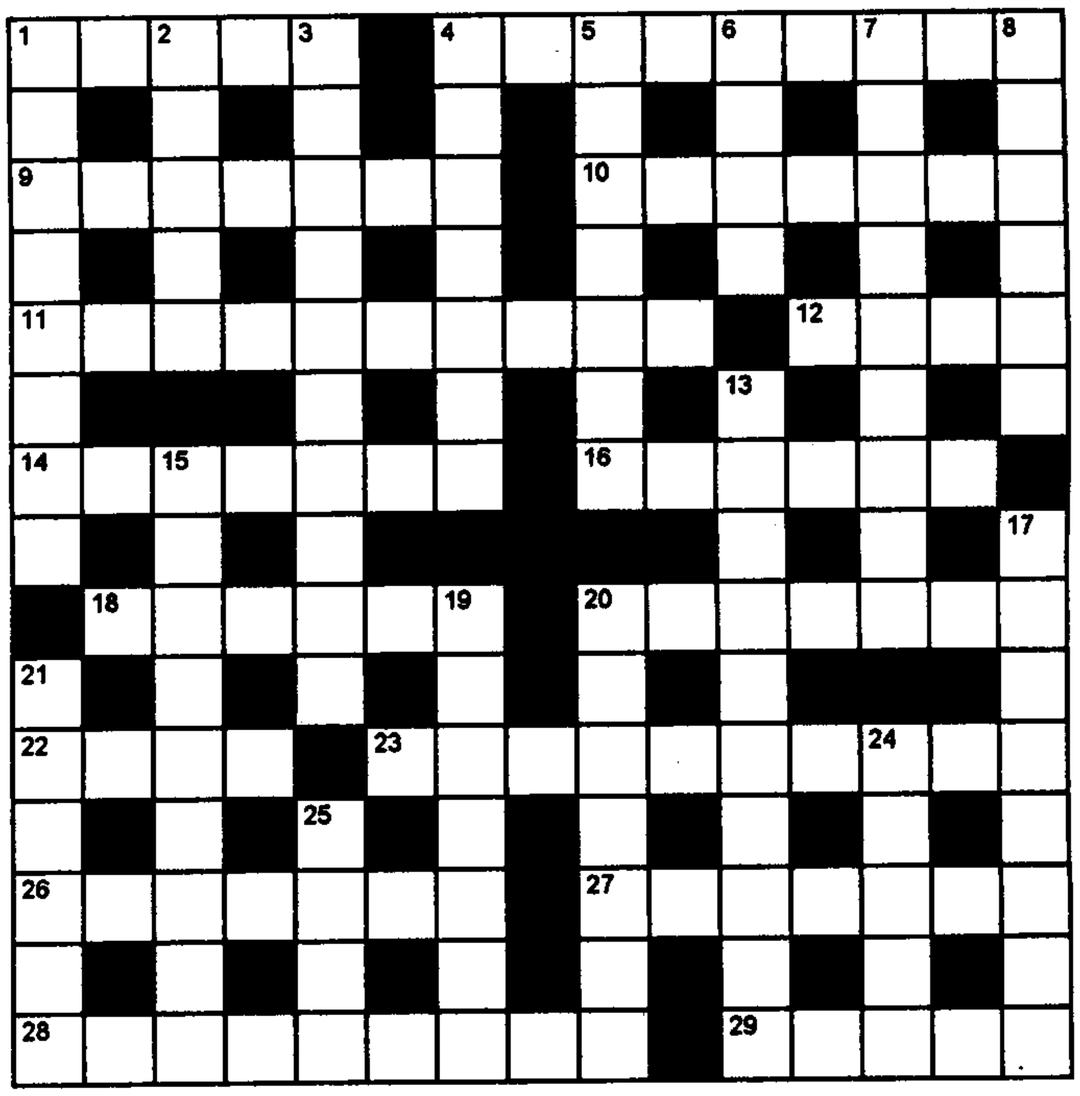
'Henry Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 258

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 7 April 2004.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1 Kevin's having to kick butt of Queen Brenda – price a suitor must pay? (5)
4 Actors collectively esteemed, being without personal hangers-on (9)
9 Rent trouble gives you nasty wind (7)
10 Kofi's lot need to establish what "those" WMD are (7)
11 Rendered speechless, depressed by what broadcasters, etc. have done? (6,4)
12 Sigh of relief when Penny gets to manipulate chopper (4)
14 Overwhelmed with processed peas and WMD (7)
16 Blair's tip to Mowlam in Senate lecture (6)
18 Acts like a dominatrix round Humberside resort? (6)
20 Sort of theatre pit connected with Conservative's extreme right wing candidate (7)
22 Knockers of *Tempest*'s lead character in "Shakespeare's It Is" (4)
23 Generous knocking-shop (right for leader of Lords) offers voyeuristic 28 (3,7)
26 Sky going bust – much money lost for the old leader (7)
27 Ken Livingstone's last to go: awful sight for crusading types (7)
28 What we're so often expected to watch: far from fantastic sex with unknown transvestite (7,2)
29 Organ symbolised by 'x' (5)

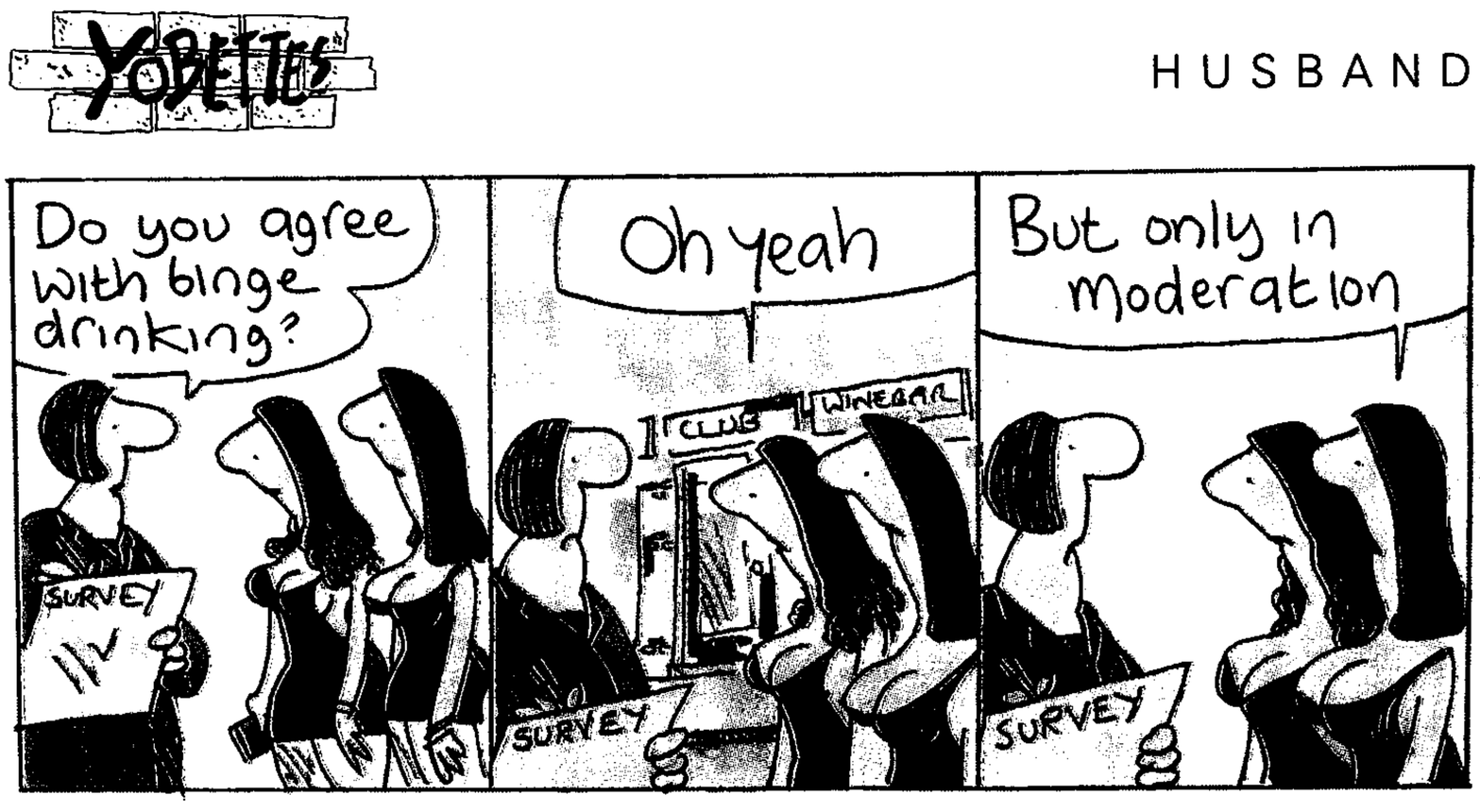
DOWN

1 Paper's financial dept. backs its boss in "sticky" shenanigans (4,4)
2 Piss off Head of Sales and get stuffed (5)
3 Old sailor's dread: being roused to ecstasy nursing a form of "no hard on" herpes (3,7)
4 Conservative stuck his oar in about "onset of defeat" and packed (7)
5 Woman with brave king getting very little sex, complains loudly (7)
6 Right, harbouring uncertainty, gets split (4)
7 Stroke pubescent hair and score (9)
8 Two party gain: Independent goes "Cheat!" (2,4)
13 Bono: "Mrs T, it turns out, is a brassy sort" (10)
15 Princess Anne's first two Astis "sadly confiscated by AA" (9)
17 Obsessive anxiety about new currency evil getting up (8)
19 Wood gets Campbell-like on swallowing an 'E' (7)
20 Fancy a bonk? Ring very controversial writer (7)
21 Footplateman gives speed to cannabis puffer (6)
24 Routine House stink (2-3)
25 Fruity thing, a bit of a dog, given 'oral' treatment (4)

Crossword 257 winner: DAVID WATSON

ACROSS: 6 Dweeb 8 Earthling 10 Overdid 11 Crinkly 12 Street of Shame 15 Embalms 17 Builder 18 Downing Street 22 Protest 24 Olivier 25 Making out 26 Kitty.

DOWN: 1 Meteor 2 Dead loss 3 Fracas 4 Thai 5 Dickhead 6 Doorstep 7 Bedfellow 9 Gays 13 A bit thick 14 Writerly 16 Bedsocks 17 Big mouth 19 Intros 20 Edicts 21 Spam 23 Edna.



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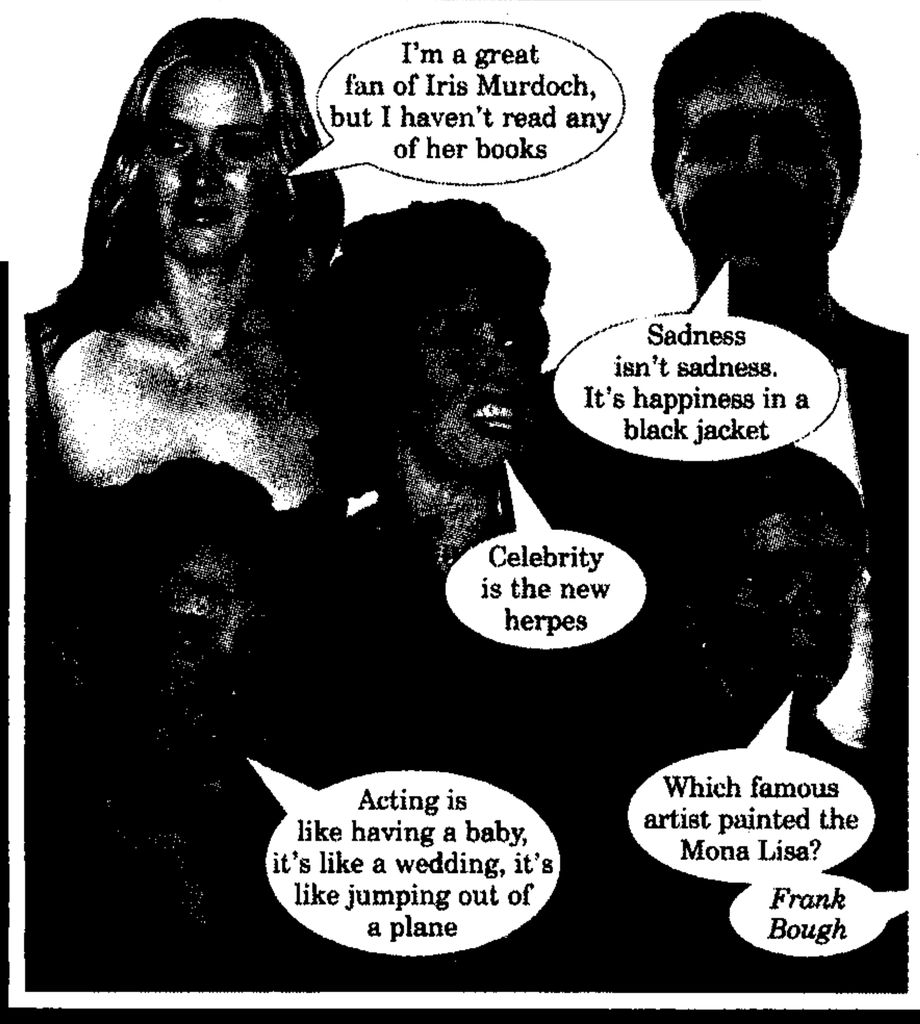
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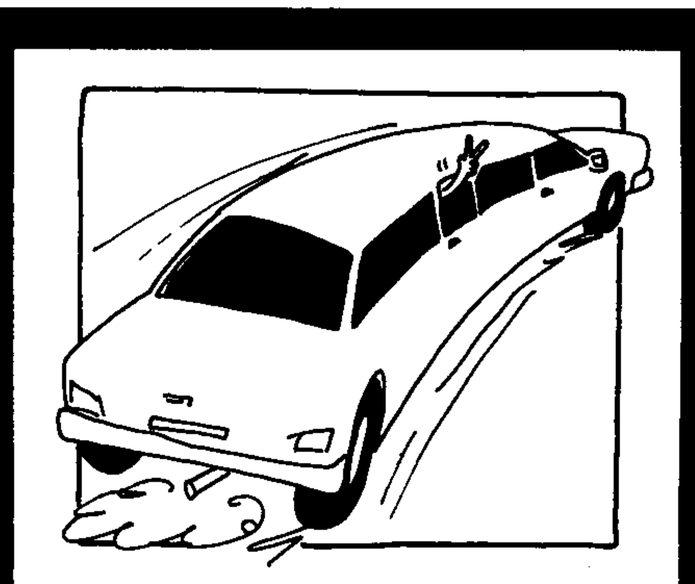

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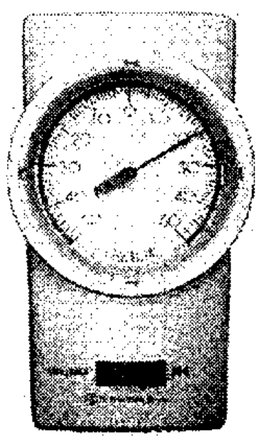

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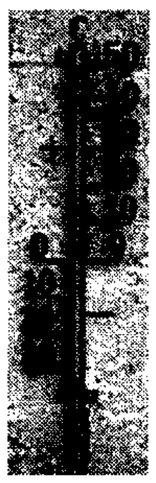

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GENEROUS SPONSOR SOUGHT to help with my education fees. £13k needed. All help gratefully appreciated. S/C 40-42-29 A/C 51376993

MARRIED, 4 CHILDREN. Appreciate financial help for PGCE Religious Education to secure family's future. Thanks patrick9802004@yahoo.co.uk

YOUNG MAN, disabled in accident, unable to work and drowning in debt (£29k), needs help to turn life around. Abbey 22575037. 09-01-26

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LITERATE, FIT, ARTY professional male, 40, WLTM slim, curvy female, 25-35ish. London/Midlands/North. Email cah0831@yahoo.co.uk

MALE, VERY GOOD LOOKING, adventurous, loves outdoor sports, seeks female for indoor sports. Tel: 07931 775025

GRANNY WEATHERWAX, 47, N.E., seeks archancellor ridcully for magical experiences. pernelle@fsmail.net

CENTRAL SCOTLAND: Sensuous female seeks similar unattached male. Reply Box 87426

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DOCTOR SOUGHT: Male, English, kind, working-class background? (latter not essential) by attractive, sensitive, slim, non-academic female, 39, for friendship. Reply Box 87622

ATTRACTIVE SINGLE FEMALE. Contact me free via lookmeup.co.uk My ID Number 124001

PUBLISHED AUTHOR seeks intelligent and attractive female company for writing trip to a holiday island. richard_8888@msn.com

BEAUTY AND BRAINS! (Linda Barker type) seeks wonderful, intelligent man (34-45). Likes keep-fit, music. Herts / London. Email: Rbccwhrtn@aol.com

LADY, YOUNG 50, seeks gentleman for emails / meeting. woldul@hotmail.com

ROMANTIC, SOPHISTICATED, WELL-READ, creative, successful attractive married n/s man, mid 40s, used to finer things in life, wants to meet similar woman for stimulating conversation and discreet liaisons. London based. Mediaman360@hotmail.com

YOUNG GRADUATE seeks his Mrs Robinson. London/Surrey. mark33955@hoymail.com

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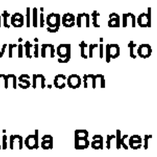
EYE CONTACT



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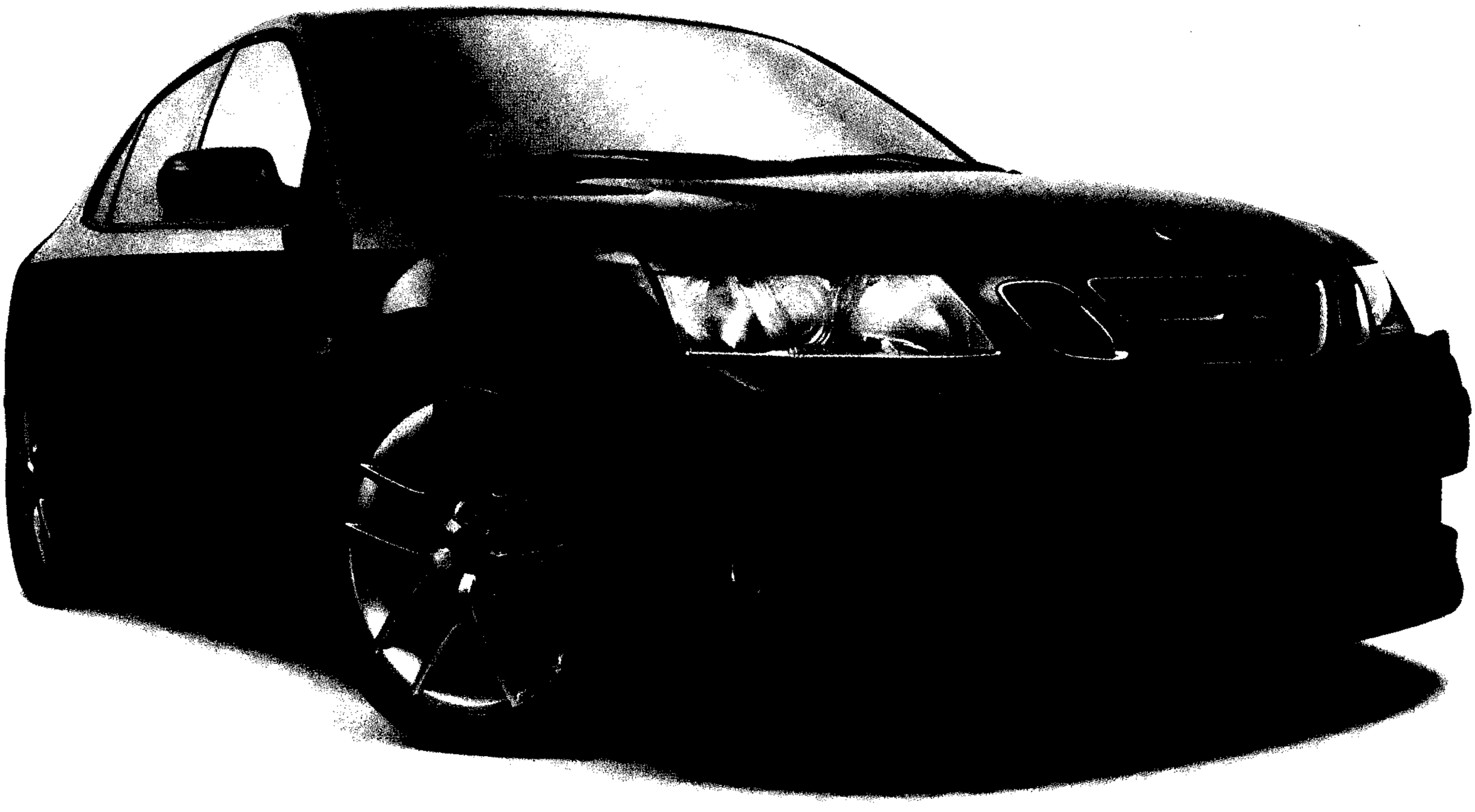

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